

FROM ADAM TO THE APOSTLES: A THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL  
EXAMINATION OF EARTHLY INHERITANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR  
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH MEMBERS OF THE UNIONTOWN CHURCH OF  
CHRIST

by  
Carl Desmartin

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## **Abstract**

Earthly inheritances have long been associated with bitter conflicts, lingering resentment, and incessant litigation. However, whereas the people of the world have provided much guidance upon this subject, the people of God have remained relatively silent. Utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods including ethnographic research, interviews and a survey, this research project addresses the Church's deficiency by developing a biblical, theological, and pastoral resource for members of the Uniontown church of Christ so that its members might better navigate matters associated with the reception, or non-reception, of an earthly inheritance.

## **Figures**

1	Total Membership at the Uniontown church of Christ	113
2	Total Worship attendance at the Uniontown church of Christ	~75

## Preface

It has long been said that there are but two certainties in life, death and taxes.<sup>1</sup> While many Christians may feel a need to add the words, “and judgment” few, if any, have ever felt a need to deny the adage outright.<sup>2</sup> Death has been part of this fallen world from the Fall of Man and taxes, we are told, arose well over 5,000 years ago.<sup>3</sup> But with this ancient tragedy and primeval burden arises yet another certainty upon this earth and, from their own experience, many know that it can be as burdensome as it can be tragic. The subject to which I allude is an earthly inheritance. This doctoral research project’s aim is to develop a biblical, theological, and pastoral resource for members of the Uniontown church of Christ so that they might better navigate matters associated with the reception, or non-reception, of earthly inheritances.

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<sup>1</sup> The origin of this expression predates the one to whom it is most often attributed - Benjamin Franklin. See Jordan Liles, “Did Ben Franklin Pen the Famous ‘Death and Taxes’ Quote?,” Snopes, July 20, 2022, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/death-and-taxes-quote/>.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information I refer the reader to the following article. Robert Deis, “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.,” This Day in Quotes, November 13, 2010, <https://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2010/11/nothing-is-certain-except-death-and-taxes/>.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Willis, “A brief history of taxation,” Accountancy Age, January 26, 2021, <https://www.accountancyage.com/2021/01/26/a-brief-history-of-taxation/>.

## Chapter 1

### Ministry Setting

I have served as the preacher for the Uniontown church of Christ for over a decade. We are a small suburban congregation with a little over 110 congregants arising from, approximately, 45 households. Currently, our Sunday morning attendance is around 75. All ages are well represented. Additionally, reflecting the demographic makeup of our surrounding community, we are predominantly white and middle-class. I am the sole employee of the congregation. However, in keeping with the pattern of the New Testament, our congregation is also served by elders (a.k.a. overseers, bishops, pastors), deacons, and other members (Acts 2:42-47, 14:21-23, 1 Cor 12:1-31, Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9).

Each week we engage in an hour-long Bible study on Sunday mornings (at 9:30 a.m.) and Wednesday nights (at 7:00 p.m.). I usually teach the adult Bible class while other members of the church instruct our youth. Depending upon both the willingness of our instructors as well as the needs of our children, during either of these hours we may have as many as six different classes being taught (i.e., Toddlers (ages 1-3), Pre-School (ages 4-5), Elementary (1st -4th grade), Intermediate (5th -7th), Teenagers (8th -12th), and Adults). Our “Philosophy of Christian Education Statement” reads:

As servants of the Lord we recognize that it is both our responsibility and privilege to Cultivate Hearts for the Reception of the Inspired, Soul-saving, Truth, namely, the word of God (James 1:21) that all might come to know, or know more fully, the One in Whom the whole fullness of deity dwells, the Word of God, Jesus our Lord (John 5:39-40).

The specific goals of our Bible School Program, succinctly and infinitively stated, are to evangelize, to edify, to equip, to encourage, and to exhort. We share the good news of

God's word with the lost, and found (Matt 28:19-20). We edify, that is, through our study of Sacred Scripture, we strive to build up the bride of Christ in the most holy faith (Eph 4:11-14; Jude 1:20-21) even as She is (we are) equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). We encourage one another through both our words and deeds (1 Thess 5:11-14), and we exhort one another to walk faithfully despite the many difficulties we encounter here in this life. Biblical instruction has always been, and will always be, of paramount importance within churches of Christ.

Because we strive to worship God according to examples found within the New Testament, we meet upon the first day of each week (i.e., Sunday), sing praises to God (acapella), pray, partake of the Lord's Supper, listen to the preaching of God's word, and give as we have prospered (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20-34, 16:2; 2 Cor 9:6-8; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 4:1-5; John 14:14; 1 Thess 5:17). Those familiar with early Christian literature may recall the description of Christian worship provided by Justin Martyr in his First Apology. Writing to the Roman emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius in the middle of the second century he says:

And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through

sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.<sup>4</sup>

Collectively we engage in the five aforementioned acts during both hours of worship.

However, only those who were unable to receive communion, and give cheerfully, during the morning service (at 10:30 a.m.) do so during the evening (at 6:30 p.m.). Apart from these particulars there are many other doctrines, dogmas, and traditions about which I could write. However, for any additional information regarding our beliefs and practices, I refer the reader to our website which is located at <https://uniontowncofc.org/>.

Recognizing that we are called to love both God and our fellow man, the congregation in Uniontown shares in many good works. Progressing from within our own community, and moving throughout the world, here is a partial list of things the Lord has accomplished through us over the past decade. For our young people, we have had monthly devotional gatherings, and annual lock-ins, youth rallies, church camps, and vacation Bible school programs. We have had monthly congregational fellowship meals, several fall festivals, two journeys to two different Bible-themed museums, and, even, two whitewater rafting trips. There has been a “senior saint” celebration, numerous family game nights, and an ongoing Christian book club. On multiple occasions we have held services in assisted living homes, and have sung Christmas carols therein and within

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<sup>4</sup> Justin Martyr, “Chapter LXVII. – Weekly Worship of the Christians,” *The First Apology of Justin Martyr*, accessed December 11, 2024, [https://ccel.org/ccel/justin\\_martyr/first\\_apology/anf01.viii.ii.lxvii.html](https://ccel.org/ccel/justin_martyr/first_apology/anf01.viii.ii.lxvii.html).

our local hospital. We have worked with a private school's weekly chapel program, encouraged the elderly at a senior center, visited prisoners, clothed the poor, and fed the hungry. We have engaged in many door knocking campaigns and have shared in Bible studies at home and around the world. Furthermore, we have repeatedly provided gifts for disadvantaged children, supported widow and orphan homes, and contributed towards disaster relief, and missionary work, both locally and globally. My family and I have been blessed to share in these good works.

The Uniontown church of Christ has always been a friendly, faithful, and loving congregation that experiences renewed vigor whenever it perceives a need. In this way, I suppose, the spirit of the congregation has permeated my person, inasmuch as I perceive a very real need to address the present topic. But, how exactly did I settle upon the subject of earthly inheritance?

### **Impetus for the Study**

Several years ago, while completing a Master of Divinity degree online with Freed-Hardeman University, I found myself in need of scholarly theological materials and resources. My home, church, and local library were all insufficient and the internet, although accessible and vast, often proved to be as frustrating as it was fruitful. I wanted to surround myself with relevant volumes in a peaceful place. I wanted to be able to read, write, and conduct research in a setting far enough removed from my daily life so as to minimize any distractions. In short, I wanted to find a nearby locale wherein I could effectively study. After searching the internet, I discovered the Antiochian Heritage Library which is located just a little over one hour northeast of my home. This, in turn, paved the way for the next phase of my academic journey.

On June 9, 2021, I was accepted into the Doctor of Ministry Program (Eastern Christian Focus) at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PTS) and, from that moment, I knew that I must decide upon a topic for the Program's requisite research project. As I was seeking a DMin, and not a PhD, many of my more intellectually inclined interests were immediately abandoned for the sake of a practical pursuit. I wanted to produce something beneficial, not merely for those who walk through the halls of academia but also for those who sit upon pews. I reflected upon both my personal and professional experience. I then looked out at the world and considered its many conflicts, especially those which were increasing. Finally, I contemplated how the Church was addressing, or failing to address, these problems. One issue stood tall: inheritance.

Personally speaking, although I have never received an inheritance, I am aware of the discord which took place within my own extended family with the passing of my paternal grandmother (May 2013). My wife's extended family also endured a similar ordeal with the passing of her maternal grandmother (November 2016). Naturally, both of us wish to avoid such unpleasantness in the future for our immediate family. But, how might this be accomplished?

Professionally speaking, for nearly two decades I have served as a minister of the gospel. During this time I have encountered scores of people who have been involved in various disputes and, while many of these have been of a more sensitive and severe nature, the acrimony associated with arguments over estates has often proven to be unparalleled. Indeed, it seems, to modify the well-known words of Oscar Wilde, "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not receiving an inheritance, and the other is

receiving it.” As a minister, I have often posited the possibility of preparing people for either prospect by pointing them to guidance gleaned from God’s word.

Having said these things, I must not give the impression that all my experiences pertaining to matters of inheritance have been marred by conflict and animosity. Two positive examples illustrate this well. First, the very house in which my family and I reside, the church’s parsonage, became available through the joint decision of two sisters to give their father’s home to the church after he passed away over eleven years ago. Were this charitable act not to have taken place, it is unlikely that my family and I would be in Uniontown today. Second, on November 13, 2020, three siblings had me preside over the reading of their mother’s will. On that day, I gathered with them in the quiet of the church building. I spoke with them, individually and collectively, and I shared with them relevant portions of God’s word (e.g., Luke 12:13-21). Finally, we prayed together just before I read the document. Although only one of them was a Christian, everything went smoothly then and thereafter. I recall thinking, “If only more families could experience this!” Clearly these positive events, along with others, have also spurred my interest in this topic.

Additionally, on July 5, 2021, at 1:01 p.m., less than one month after I had been accepted as a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, I created a subfolder on my personal computer titled, “Inheritance.” This was a pivotal moment for me, inasmuch as I established that folder for the purpose of gathering relevant materials for the present undertaking. Since that time I have engaged in, and completed, many courses with my cohort. Along the way, I have continued to consider my project in light of escalating issues and conflicts around the globe.

During the Fall of 2023, while steeped in research and completing a paper for our Eastern Christian Proposal Seminar course, I discovered a “coming crisis” that well related to my research interest. In part, the following is what I found, thought, and planned.

In a May 2023 brief released by the U.S. Census Bureau, statisticians Zoe Caplan and Megan Rabe, presciently pronounced:

The older population in the United States grew rapidly this past decade. Between 2010 and 2020, the population 65 years and over saw the largest and fastest growth in any decade since 1880 to 1890, reaching 55.8 million or 16.8 percent of the total population in 2020. This increase was largely driven by the aging of the baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964), the first of whom turned 65 years old in 2011. As the baby boomers continue to age, the older population will make up an increasing share of the total U.S. population.<sup>5</sup>

Although those words had been recently penned, the information conveyed by them was not unexpected. I continued my investigation, delving more deeply into online resources, and located a July 7, 1996, article in The New York Times that began:

In the next decade the first of the Baby Boomers will enter their sixties and begin to retire, making room for new workers in many professions. But their aging should have an even more direct impact on the job market: it is expected to spur a boom in health care professions. Jobs for home health care workers in particular will grow more in the next 10 years than jobs in almost any other industry or field...mostly the growth will be a response to good old fashioned demand: as humans age, their bodies begin to break down, and a lot of people will for the first time need nurses, physical therapists and home care attendants.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Changes in the Older Population and Implications for Rural Areas, 2020 Census Brief, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, 2023, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/2020/census-briefs/c2020br-07.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> New York Times, "Aging Baby Boomers Will Mean a Surge in Health Care Jobs," The New York Times Web Archive, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/jobmarket/0707sabra.html>.

Drawing closer to the present, I acquired a third resource, this one was published by The Washington Times on April 11, 2006. It related:

The number of elderly in the world is simply set to explode,” said Jacob Kirkegaard, a research associate at the Institute for International Economics. In the United States, the number of people older than 65 is expected to grow 133 percent by 2050. In comparison, the 16-to 64-year-old age group is expected to grow 25 percent, he said. “The global demographics are changing at a rapid rate,” said J.W. Marriott Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of Marriott International Inc. in Bethesda. “Baby boomers are now retiring with a lot of money to travel.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, after combing through additional archives, I uncovered an October 31, 2014, article from CNN, which concluded with these words:

More than 17% of the 76 million Boomers are already retired and about 10,000 will reach the traditional retirement age of 65 every day for the next 15 years. And even though many Boomers plan to stay in their current homes, the Demand Institute estimates that this generation will purchase about \$1.9 trillion in homes over the next five years. "Their choices will have a real impact on the housing sector..."<sup>8</sup>

As I reflected upon all these documents, I thought of how, for decades, the governing powers of our Nation, and others around the world, have anticipated the present period. They have prepared for these days through an endless array of panels, proposals, and projects. Additionally, it is clear that individuals, companies, and corporations have planned for, and profited from, the aging baby boomer population. However, with these many opportunities also comes many challenges. And these challenges move far beyond

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<sup>7</sup> The Washington Times, "Critics Slam Medicare Drug Plan as Confusing," *The Washington Times*, April 11, 2006, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2006/apr/11/20060411-085027-6167r/>.

<sup>8</sup> CNN Money, "How Baby Boomers Will Impact the Housing Market," *CNN Money*, October 30, 2014, accessed December 31, 2024, [https://money.cnn.com/2014/10/30/real\\_estate/baby-boomers-homes/index.html](https://money.cnn.com/2014/10/30/real_estate/baby-boomers-homes/index.html).

such things as jobs, healthcare, retirement, travel, and housing. They are matters, not just of life, but also of death.

Baby boomers' ages currently range from 61 to 79. However, globally speaking, the average life expectancy is only 73 years<sup>9</sup> and in the United States it is only slightly higher coming in at 76.4 years (Males 73.5 – Females 79.3).<sup>10</sup> Although life spans are expected to increase gradually, it remains clear that over the next decade, or two, the majority of that generation will have passed away. Indeed, the death care industry marches on and business is booming. Or should I say, “boomeraging?” For, truly, as that generation shaped so many other industries by their decisions in life, so, too, are they now shaping this industry by their decisions regarding death. Cremations, Green Burials, At-Home Funerals, Life Celebrations, and even, Destination Funerals are all gaining ascendancy, especially here in the United States, owing largely to the choices the boomers have made.<sup>11</sup> The global market for death care services was estimated at \$118.3 billion (U.S.) dollars in the year 2022. By 2030 it is projected to increase by over 60% to 189.8 billion dollars.<sup>12</sup> And yet, these numbers pale in comparison to the ones to which we now turn.

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<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization, "Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)," *Global Health Observatory*, accessed December 31, 2024, [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/life-expectancy-at-birth-\(years\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/life-expectancy-at-birth-(years)).

<sup>10</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Life Expectancy," *National Center for Health Statistics*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/life-expectancy.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Bernhard Schroeder, "Baby Boomers Are Fueling an Industry That Is Ripe for Disruption: The Rise of the Death Concierge," *Forbes*, April 15, 2019, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernhardschroeder/2019/04/15/baby-boomers-are-fueling-an-industry-that-is-ripe-for-disruption-the-rise-of-the-death-concierge/?sh=a1d9cb0870d2>.

<sup>12</sup> Research and Markets, *Death Care Services: Global Strategic Business Report*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5141466/death-care-services-global-strategic->

Two years ago, while writing for *Fortune*, Ivana Pino began an article with these words:

As the oldest working generation, baby boomers have one foot in the workforce and another in retirement. Time and favorable economic conditions have made it easier for this generation to build wealth compared to younger generations. A 2022 study projects that wealth transferred through 2045 will total \$84.4 trillion—\$72.6 trillion in assets will be transferred to heirs, while \$11.9 trillion will be donated to charities. Greater than \$53 trillion will be transferred from households in the Baby Boomer generation, representing 63% of all transfers.<sup>13</sup>

Although estimates regarding the value of these assets do vary, all agree that the “Great Wealth Transfer” is already underway.<sup>14</sup> This is the largest wealth transfer period in history. And with its steady advent also comes a steady stream of advice. Doone Roisin, a contributor to *Entrepreneur*, provides this perspective:

In a post-World War II world, the baby boomers' working and living experiences were that of great prosperity. Their parents had already made sacrifices during the war years to give them a better life and had paid all the taxes necessary to keep university tuition low, which meant as young adults entering the workforce for the first time, boomers could graduate with little to no debt. At the same time, housing was plentiful post-war, and strong labor protections meant even high school graduates could afford to buy their first homes on a minimum hourly rate salary. These homes then continued to appreciate in value over time, and decades of economic growth followed for the boomers. So much so that by 2020, records show that the baby boomer generation held approximately 57% of all wealth and assets in the U.S economy. In comparison, millennials held just 3% of the country's entire wealth.

Ms. Roisin continued by suggesting three “ways to prepare...for the Great Wealth Transfer, and...improve your financial position, whether you're due to receive an

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[business?utm\\_source=GNOM&utm\\_medium=PressRelease&utm\\_code=29w7hl&utm\\_campaign=1829691+-+Death+Care+Services+Global+Market+to+Reach+%24189.8+Billion+by+2030%3a+Environment+Friendly+Green+Burials+Rise+in+Popularity&utm\\_exec=jamu273prd.](https://www.fortune.com/recommends/investing/baby-boomers-average-net-worth/)

<sup>13</sup> *Fortune*, "Average Net Worth of Baby Boomers," *Fortune Recommends*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://fortune.com/recommends/investing/baby-boomers-average-net-worth/>

<sup>14</sup> *CNBC*, "How to Navigate the Great Wealth Transfer, According to Top Advisors," *CNBC*, October 17, 2022, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/17/how-to-navigate-the-great-wealth-transfer-according-to-top-advisors.html>.

inheritance...or not,” To summarize they are, open communication, financial awareness, and having a plan.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Wes Moss, a money educator, managing partner, author, contributor, podcaster, and “fervent financial evangelist”<sup>16</sup> posits and proclaims:

What would you do with an unexpected gift of \$220,000? Inversely, what would a \$220,000 contribution from you mean for your legacy and loved ones? For more than a year I’ve been reading about a staggering phenomenon known as The Great Wealth Transfer. According to Forbes, some experts are estimating that somewhere between \$30 trillion to \$68 trillion dollars will be shifted from baby boomers, people born between 1946 and 1964, to Generation X (1965-1980) and millennials (1981-1996)...These figures are almost too massive to digest, so let’s try to put them into perspective. In 2021, the gross domestic product (GDP) for the entire United States was around \$22 trillion. You read that correctly. The total value of goods produced and services provided in the U.S. was considerably less than the low estimate of this looming transfer. If we were to take \$30 trillion and divide it by the total combined population of Generation X and millennials in the U.S. — approximately 136 million people — we’d end up with an average of \$220,000 per person. For a married couple, that’s close to half a million dollars. This kind of financial statistic is almost always weighted toward a smaller percentage of very wealthy folks...However, it is important to realize that most of us will be impacted.

Mr. Moss then conveys a story about a couple that received a sizeable inheritance before turning his attention, and advice, to those who will leave an inheritance to others. He continues:

perhaps you’re a baby boomer starting to think about maximizing the utilization of your investments. You still have plenty of happy retirement to live, but it’s never too early to plan. Remember that no matter the size or construction of your portfolio, there are no ATMs in heaven. Why not leave something that will impact the world and leave those around you feeling thankful for your contribution? As we all know, a little financial planning goes a long way. Once you take stock of your specific situation, you may realize that in 10, 20 or 30 years you may have significant wealth. Consider a few rules in this process: Rule #1: Recognition. It’s okay to admit that there may be a big pile of money left after you’ve gone. Make sure you and your spouse are solvent, but what do you want to happen to the rest

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<sup>15</sup> Entrepreneur, "3 Ways to Prepare Yourself for the Great Wealth Transfer," *Entrepreneur*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/money-finance/3-ways-to-prepare-yourself-for-the-great-wealth-transfer/434715>.

<sup>16</sup> Wes Moss, "About," *Wes Moss*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.wesmoss.com/about/>.

of it?...Rule #2: Uses Today. If it turns out you will have a surplus, that may impact your current giving strategy. Perhaps some of your favorite people and organizations could benefit right now from your hard work and savings...Rule #3: Uses Tomorrow. This is where you will have to think through the instructions that you pass on to the next generation. Take advantage of will and estate planning to decide the best and most tax-efficient use of your hard-earned savings...The bottom line is that in the coming years a lot of money will transfer hands. Some people will be affected more than others, but the jolt will be felt far and wide. It would be foolish not to chart your own course on the giving or the receiving end.<sup>17</sup>

Would that it were so simple!

As I read one “Great Wealth Transfer” article after another, I became convinced that this unprecedented phenomenon was highly pertinent to my project. I wanted to investigate earthly inheritance. Here it was, obviously and grandly, placed before me! I wanted to produce a resource to help those to whom I minister. Surely, this was my opportunity! But what wisdom had the world and, more importantly, the Church already offered?

This, in turn, led me to sort through various secular sources. What I found therein was that there was one thing to which these commentators hardly alluded, one thing which their “idealized scenarios” often minimized or, worst of all, excluded entirely. Yet it was, and is, the one thing that everyone knows can never be disregarded in discussions that touch upon material wealth. Namely, human nature.

Simply put, not everyone says or does the things they should. We know this, if not spiritually and intellectually, then, at least, observationally, and experientially. To say, as Moss does, “it would be foolish not to chart your own course” is a fine enough thing to

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<sup>17</sup> The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, “Taking Advantage of the Coming Great Wealth Transfer,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.ajc.com/news/business/taking-advantage-of-the-coming-great-wealth-transfer/YQMO4JJW7NBSHEM72QC4TARVZU/>.

say, at least, for one who has embraced secular humanism. But it is certainly not a thorough thing to say, for the simple fact that this world is, evidently, full of fools. Some time ago, an article from The Wall Street Journal titled, “The Confusing Fallout of Dying Without a Will,” began:

Despite potentially devastating consequences for their heirs, millions of Americans still haven’t written a will. While the total real wealth of households has tripled over the past three decades, according to the Congressional Budget Office, 54% of Americans told Gallup they didn’t have a will in 2021. Even the wealthy put off estate planning—one in five Americans with investible assets of \$1 million or more don’t have a will, according to a recent Charles Schwab survey. If you die without a will, a range of state laws dictate who gets your assets, and your loved ones may get nothing...Dying intestate can have unintended consequences for pretty much every family type...Without a will or trust, you’re giving up the opportunity to say who will administer your estate, who will be a guardian for minor children, and who will get what.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, even if one dies with a will in place, it does not follow that it will be legal, or indisputable. Later this same article continues:

The way people want to distribute their assets is often at odds with the law, a survey of 9,000 Americans conducted by two Yale law professors found. Nearly 30% of people who were married with children said they would prefer to leave their spouse nothing, co-author John Morley said. Many would like to leave substantial assets to their live-in nonmarital partners. And many would prefer to give much less to parents than intestacy laws provide, and much more to siblings.<sup>19</sup>

We live in a litigious society that, very often, brings out the worst in people. An accomplished local comedian, Matt “Wolfie” Wohlfarth, captured this well when he said,

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<sup>18</sup> MSN, “What Happens If You Die Without a Will? It Depends,” *MSN News*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/what-happens-if-you-die-without-a-will-it-depends/ar-AA1aCUSE>.

<sup>19</sup> MSN, “What Happens If You Die Without a Will? It Depends,” *MSN News*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/what-happens-if-you-die-without-a-will-it-depends/ar-AA1aCUSE>.

“You know what they say, where there’s a will, there’s a family fighting over it.” This selection from an article on Forbes’ website is illustrative:

Recently I witnessed a friend become embroiled in an ugly inheritance battle with his siblings. The decades long-simmering battle took front and center when the patriarch of the family passed on leaving a sizable estate, a wife with memory loss and three acrimonious adult children.

While still alive the dad, without consulting a physician, diagnosed his wife with Alzheimer's. With this in mind, and having argued with my friend, he chose to leave his estate and authority over his wife's care in the hands of his other two children. These covetous two, now executors of the estate, sprung into action. Within 14 days of their father’s passing they nefariously moved their mother into a senior care facility, put a lock box on the family home and called a RE agent to represent the sale of this multi-million dollar property.

My friend was left with the responsibility to prove his mother’s mental capacity and honor her lifestyle wishes. After a pricey legal and mental competency battle his mom is finally back in her home and able to independently mandate how HER money is spent. The three adult children are not speaking to each other. Sadly this family is not alone in the growing inheritance battlefield.<sup>20</sup>

Although scenarios do vary, they are often as heartbreaking as they are unending. And what is their root cause? Is it not us? Indeed, it is. I have already acknowledged the human element. But, specifically, what are some of the main contributing factors that lead to family fallout? Unsurprisingly, the aforementioned article underscores the most obvious, money:

a significant percentage of children and grandchildren fighting for what they believe is their fair share of inheritance while either one or both aging parents are still alive. Michael Fuhr, CFP of SageVest Wealth Management, posits that this trend is happening as adult children are not sufficiently saving for their own retirement. They get caught short. And it's further complicated by adult children who feel entitled to their parents’ money. They have lived their lives under the assumption that their inheritance will fund their retirement plans. Geropsychology expert, Aladdin Ossorio, PsyD, suggests this is happening primarily because we live in a money-obsessed culture. "Maximizing one’s

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<sup>20</sup> Kerri Zane, "The Shocking Reason Why Siblings Squabble Over Inheritance and How to Prevent It," *Forbes*, November 14, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kerrizane/2016/11/14/the-shocking-reason-why-siblings-squabble-over-inheritance-and-how-to-prevent-it/?sh=64f63b0b64f6>.

financial position is a primary motivator. The opportunity to obtain money overrides ethical behavior...”<sup>21</sup>

Admittedly, there are other factors involved in these disputes and, chances are, the reader has already begun calling them to mind. Of course, if your thoughts are like my own, then I trust that this extraction, from an article titled, “Inheritance: The #1 Cause of Adult Sibling Rivalry,” will prove pertinent.

The death of a parent is a difficult test for sibling relationships. Not only does it create a great deal of emotional tumult on an individual level, it can also stir up feelings of tension and suspicion between siblings. Old grievances can suddenly seem fresh if brothers and sisters are forced to try and address delicate financial issues on their own. The variety of potential problems is endless. Many things can exacerbate the already trying process of settling a parent’s estate and distributing the inheritance. Differing perceptions of what each sibling has “earned” can create very different expectations. A common scenario is when one child has done the lion’s share of the work taking care of an aging parent and assumes that he or she will receive the corresponding share of the inheritance. Or perhaps one child received financial support in the form of a loan, investment, or property while the parent was still alive, and the other siblings feel that should be factored into how the remainder of the inheritance is divided. Economic disparity between siblings can also create conflicts around how certain assets are divided and managed. An individual who is more financially stable, for instance, might prefer to hold onto a particular asset in the hopes of a long-term payout while a sibling who has a greater financial need may want to turn the asset around for a more immediate return. Other common issues have to do with how new spouses or step-siblings figure into the picture, how dependent siblings (with physical or mental illness) are cared for, the estrangement of certain children from the parent, and the ugly possibility that one sibling (the “favorite”) may have exerted undue influence for personal gain. All these situations, and too many others to name, pit siblings against each other as they try to sort out who gets what.<sup>22</sup>

Molly Zilli provides a refreshing perspective and point. “A good way to think about an inheritance is to assume you're getting nothing. After all, it is someone else's money. That

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<sup>21</sup> Kerri Zane, "The Shocking Reason Why Siblings Squabble Over Inheritance and How to Prevent It," *Forbes*, November 14, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kerrizane/2016/11/14/the-shocking-reason-why-siblings-squabble-over-inheritance-and-how-to-prevent-it/?sh=64f63b0b64f6>.

<sup>22</sup> Czepiga Daly Pope & Perri, "Inheritance: The #1 Cause of Adult Sibling Rivalry," *Czepiga Daly Pope & Perri Blog*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.czepigalaw.com/blog/inheritance-1-cause-adult-sibling-rivalry/>.

way, when you do receive an inheritance, it's a blessing. But try telling that to siblings who feel entitled to their parents' assets..."<sup>23</sup> Amen.

It was clear that the inheritance we pass on, or receive, can be either a blessing or a curse to ourselves and to our loved ones. This led me to ponder, in contrast to the worldly wisdom that was being offered by secularists, what godly guidance was being offered by God's children? Did the Church have a "word from the Lord?" And, if so, what was She saying? Sadly, upon further investigation, I discovered that the answer to that question was, "Very little."

After completing my final DMin course (Eastern Christian Proposal Seminar) in September 2023, I looked forward to finalizing my Research Project Proposal. As with the pursuit of my Master of Divinity, once again, I found myself in need of scholarly theological materials. My home, church, and local library remained insufficient for this task. So, again, I turned to the internet, and, more importantly, the two theological libraries of which I had grown fond and to which I had secured access. They were the Antiochian Heritage Library and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's own, Barbour Library.

Although I spent time, and exerted a great deal of effort, searching for relevant Christian resources for my project I acquired few. I turned to my colleagues and my professors and, although they recommended several books and peer reviewed articles, I was not overwhelmed with material. Finally, I sought professional assistance from the

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<sup>23</sup> FindLaw, "3 Common Reasons Siblings Fight Over Inheritance," *FindLaw Blog*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.findlaw.com/legalblogs/law-and-life/3-common-reasons-siblings-fight-over-inheritance/>.

librarians I knew and they, too, procured little for my primary purpose. To be brief, most of the resources I assembled dealt explicitly with money, wealth, and possessions. They only implicitly dealt with earthly inheritances. Yet, this lack of material reassured me of the reasonableness of my aim. That is, I wanted to create a resource to assist others, and especially members of the Uniontown church of Christ, in navigating issues related to the giving, or receiving, of an earthly inheritance.

After submitting my Research Project Proposal, and revising it accordingly, I have decided to develop a systematic way of thinking biblically and theologically about inheritance. This undertaking will be developed in conjunction with, and tested by, members of the Uniontown church of Christ. It will culminate in a sermon and PowerPoint presentation that will serve as my resource. I have settled upon the following course.

### **Preview of Remaining Chapters**

In Chapter 2 I will lay the groundwork for the development of a biblical, theological, and pastoral resource (i.e., a sermon) that will expound a Christian understanding of wealth, in general, and earthly inheritances, in particular. This endeavor will be grounded in biblical principles and illuminated by particular passages of Scripture that will lead to practical application for contemporary Christians.

In Chapter 3 I will present an overview of my work to a select group of people within my congregation who have experienced inheritance-related issues. I will then interview them for two reasons. First, I want to understand any barriers to peace, and sources of conflict, that they have encountered so that I might more effectively minister

to them and others. Second, I want to discover questions that my independent analysis fails to adequately address. Following the interviews, I will prepare a sermon, with an accompanying PowerPoint, to present to all members of the church. My message will have specific goals, unknown to anyone but myself. Upon completion, I will evaluate its effectiveness in meeting my goals via a congregational survey.

In Chapter 4 I will evaluate my project, relate what I have learned, and suggest areas of further investigation. Additionally, I will reflect upon how my ministry has changed and grown through this process.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Introduction**

In the beginning God created everything and all things were good. The first man, Adam, and his wife, the first woman, Eve, dwelt together in Eden. There, in a garden the LORD had planted, they were told, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). It was the one thing expressly forbidden. But our parents were disobedient. They took hold of the tree’s fruit. They ate it. And they were expelled from the Garden (Gen 1-3). Referring to this event, the Apostle Paul said, “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all” (Rom 5:12). Indeed, death spread to all but that was not all that was handed down. For, with the passing of our parents from this life, so, too, came the passing of our parents’ earthly possessions to those of us who continue in this life.

In this chapter I will discuss the biblical and theological foundation for my project. This undertaking will proceed in the following manner. First, I will examine the frequency, derivation, and usage of the various terms that may be translated as “inheritance” within the Bible. Next, adhering to a largely chronological approach and drawing upon the works of others, I will explore relevant portions of both the Old and New Testament to ascertain a biblical view regarding wealth, generally, and earthly inheritances, specifically. Finally, having anchored this research in biblical principles illuminated by particular passages, I will provide practical guidance for contemporary Christians, especially members of the Uniontown church of Christ.

## Biblical Investigation – A Semantic Analysis

The word inheritance appears 208 times in the English Standard Version. Its plural form appears in five additional passages. Within these 213 instances an earthly inheritance is typically in view. However, within the pages of the New Testament, an eternal, heavenly, inheritance also emerges. For nearly 2,000 years this Christian inheritance has received much attention. However, for the sake of this project, it is not my chief interest. Although, I will draw parallels between, and contrast, the heavenly inheritance with earthly inheritances; it is with the latter that I am primarily concerned.

In English translations of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word, *naḥālāh*, is most often rendered as “inheritance.” The word, including its various forms, appears 223 times within 191 verses of the Masoretic Text. It is derived from the root, *naḥal*, meaning “to inherit” or “to possess.”<sup>24</sup> Figuratively speaking, the word may describe a person’s fate (Job 20:29; 27:13; 31:2), their portion or participation in something (2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 12:16), or something granted unto them (Ps 127:3).<sup>25</sup>

A second Hebrew word, *ḥēleq*, is also rendered as “inheritance.” This word, including its various forms, appears 67 times within 63 verses of the Masoretic Text. Additionally, in 18 of these instances it is paralleled by *naḥālāh*. It is derived from the root verb, *ḥālaq*, meaning “to divide” or “to apportion.”<sup>26</sup> As with *naḥālāh*, *ḥēleq* is used

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<sup>24</sup> Bible Hub. "Strong's Hebrew: 5159. נַחֲלָה (*naḥālāh*)." Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5159.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> G. Wanke, “naḥālāh,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 932-936.

<sup>26</sup> Bible Hub. "Strong's Hebrew: 2506. חֵלֶק (*ḥēleq*)." Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2506.htm>.

figuratively in a variety of ways. Most notably, the fact that the Levites were to receive Yahweh as their portion/inheritance rather than any property within the Promised Land suggests that there is something of greater value than an earthly inheritance.<sup>27</sup> “Therefore Levi has no portion (*hēleq*) or inheritance (*naḥālāh*) with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance (*naḥālāh*)... (Deut 10:9a).”

A third Hebrew term, *môṛāš*, may also be rendered as “inheritance.” This word, and its various forms, appears only three times in three verses of the Masoretic Text, namely, Job 17:11, Isa 14:23, and Obad 1:17. It is derived from the far more frequently occurring verb, *yāraš*, meaning “to possess” or “to inherit.”<sup>28</sup>

Upon comparing the Masoretic Text to the Septuagint (LXX) one discovers that the Greek words, *klēronomia* and *klēros* best correspond to the aforementioned Hebrew terms. This prepares us for an analysis of the Greek New Testament.

In the English Standard Version the word *klēronomia* is always translated as “inheritance.” It appears 14 times within 14 verses of the New Testament. The word is derived from *klēronomos*, meaning an “heir” or “one who receives by lot.” *Klēronomia* may be defined as inheritance, property, or possession. In the New Testament it is especially used to refer to the possession of transcendent salvation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> H.H. Schmid, “*hēleq*,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 572-575. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Bible Hub. “Strong's Hebrew: 4180. מוֹרָשׁ (*môṛāš*).” Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4180.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Bauer et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature (Third Edition)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2000), 547-548.

The word *klēros* is translated in various ways within the English Standard Version. It appears 13 times within 11 verses of the New Testament. The word is derived from *kláō*, meaning “to break” or “to divide.” *Klēros* may be defined as a lot, portion, share, or, even, one’s destiny.<sup>30</sup>

In the next sections, I will accomplish the following. First, drawing upon the investigations of others, I will set forth a biblical theology of earthly wealth, generally. Second, upon conducting my own survey and investigation, I will set forth a biblical theology of earthly inheritances, specifically. Finally, I will provide practical guidance that will play a pivotal role in the resource I am preparing for members of the Uniontown church of Christ.

### **Biblical Investigation – A Perspective on Worldly Wealth**

Throughout the ages, the amount of literature that has been produced regarding worldly wealth is incalculable. There are, and have been, an endless number of resources that have arisen in every era, by every level of expositor, almost everywhere. Even when we narrow our focus to compositions that center solely upon the Bible, we are still met with an overwhelming amount of information. Of course, though it may be popular to say that there are as many biblical theologies on wealth as there are commentators, the truth is, over the course of time, a remarkable agreement has been maintained. In this section I will examine the writings of three authors. I will then convey their perspectives regarding

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<sup>30</sup> Bauer et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 548.

earthly wealth. Finally, I will combine their views with my own to provide a general view of this topic in preparation for our examination of earthly inheritances.

Craig L. Blomberg's *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* is a relatively recent, and highly regarded, composition. In the author's own words he sets out:

to "write a 'biblical theology' of material possessions...with...detailed attention to Old Testament and intertestamental foundations,...historical backgrounds, literary context, the unique genres of each portion of Scripture and the key hermeneutical issues attaching to a contemporary application of the biblical data."<sup>31</sup>

Although he moves meticulous through the relevant material, Blomberg humbly admits, "Any attempt to summarize the dominant emphases in any large swathe of biblical material inevitably oversimplifies."<sup>32</sup> This admission paves the way for his conclusions. They are as follows.

1. *Material possessions are a good gift from God meant for his people to enjoy*
2. *Material possessions are simultaneously one of the primary means of turning human hearts away from God*
3. *A necessary sign of life in the process of being redeemed is that of transformation in the area of stewardship*
4. *There are certain extremes of wealth and poverty which are in and of themselves intolerable*
5. *Above all, the Bible's teaching about material possessions is inextricably intertwined with more 'spiritual' matters*<sup>33</sup>

Regarding the application of these successive conclusions Blomberg writes:

First, if wealth is an inherent good, Christians should try to gain it. If some of us succeed more than the majority, our understanding of it as God's gift for all will

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<sup>31</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downer Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 28.

<sup>32</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 241.

<sup>33</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 243-246.

lead us to want to share with the needy, particularly those who are largely victims of circumstance outside their control. Second, if wealth is seductive, giving away some of our surplus is a good strategy for resisting the temptation to overvalue it. Third, if stewardship is a sign of a redeemed life, then Christians will, by their new natures, want to give. Over time, compassionate and generous use of their resources will become an integral part of their Christian lives. Fourth, if certain extremes of wealth and poverty are inherently intolerable, those of us with excess income (i.e., most readers of this book!) will work hard to help at least a few of the desperately needy in our world. Fifth, if holistic salvation represents the ultimate good God wants all to receive, then our charitable giving should be directed to individuals, churches or organizations who minister holistically, caring for people's bodies as well as their souls, addressing their physical as well as their spiritual circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

In the final three sentences of his book, Blomberg reveals the inspiration behind its title while, albeit unknowingly, underscoring a major motivation for my own inquiry. He urges:

The greatest transfer of wealth in human history has begun, from the post-war generation of the West to its heirs, and it will continue in the next decade or two. Will the heirs' newly acquired money go merely to fuel the greatest round of consumer spending ever or simply to pay off the massive indebtedness that has already been accrued, or will we recover a biblical perspective on stewardship of material possessions? "Give me neither poverty nor riches," prayed the writer of the proverb; but, since most of us already have riches, we need to be praying more often, "and help me to be generous and wise in giving more of those riches away."<sup>35</sup>

A more recent work, penned by Walter Brueggemann, titled *Money and Possessions* is also beneficial. Like Blomberg, Brueggemann offers a thorough and thoughtful survey of Sacred Scripture. At the outset he asserts, "Any study of money and possessions in the Bible is confronted with a mass of data that is complex and diverse in a way that refuses any systematic summary." Indeed, he continues, "It is impossible in any survey to notice or discuss every possible reference, so one's treatment of the subject is

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<sup>34</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 247.

<sup>35</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 253.

sure to be selective.”<sup>36</sup> However, to counter difficulties associated with his approach, Brueggemann adopts the following strategy.

I propose six theses concerning money and possessions in the Bible that will provide a general frame of reference for the textual particularity that follows. In light of these theses I will survey, in canonical sequence, a variety of texts that variously witness to the truth of these theses.

1. Money and possessions are gifts from God
2. Money and possessions are received as reward for obedience
3. Money and possessions belong to God and are held in trust by human persons in community
4. Money and possessions are sources of social injustice
5. Money and possessions are to be shared in a neighborly way
6. Money and possessions are seductions that lead to idolatry<sup>37</sup>

With a view towards applicability, Brueggemann underscores that each proposal “voices a clear contradiction to the conventional wisdom of the ancient world and that in our time each of them contradicts the uncriticized wisdom of market ideology.”<sup>38</sup> Later he observes:

We live in a society that would like to bracket out money and possessions...from ultimate questions. The Bible insists otherwise. It insists that the issues of ultimacy are questions about money and possessions. Biblical testimony invites a serious reconsideration of the ways in which our society engages or does not engage questions of money and possessions as carriers of social possibility.<sup>39</sup>

A final work, written by Ben Witherington III, titled *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crises* also explores a biblical theology of worldly wealth. Early on, the author contrasts an unnamed 21<sup>st</sup> century televangelist and proponent of the

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 1-6.

<sup>38</sup> Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 12-13.

prosperity gospel with John Chrysostom, a church father and ascetic of the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. About the former Witherington says:

This one had perfectly coiffed hair, an Armani suit pressed to perfection, and a beaming, toothy smile. He insisted that Christians who were faithful should be rich, and he said not a word about any kind of sacrifice. It was like watching a Zig Ziglar infomercial with occasional sprinkles on top. In America that's how we like our religion, easy on theology and guilt trips, heavy on the material blessing and easy paths to obtaining what our possessive hearts desire.<sup>40</sup>

Witherington then turns his attention to Chrysostom and notes the contrast:

His motto was along the lines of “when in doubt, leave it out.” What struck me is that Chrysostom and the televangelist were saying diametrically opposite things about what God really wants for us, and what the true gospel entails.. Chrysostom is very emphatic – it is only the pagans who strive for material success, prosperity, and the lifestyle of the rich and famous. It is only the pagans who overeat, overbuy, and in general are into supersizing everything from waistlines, to clothing, to houses, to jewelry, to vehicles. Only pagans would be that self-indulgent, in Chrysostom's view. So what we now call the prosperity gospel is, according to Chrysostom, the world's gospel, not the Savior's gospel.<sup>41</sup>

Witherington later clarifies his position, critiques his opposition, and expresses his own conviction in these words.

I think that *both* the televangelists and Chrysostom have it wrong in some ways, but that clearly Chrysostom is closer to the truth and the real heart of the matter than the prosperity preachers are...My basic problem with prosperity preachers is that they want to baptize the materialistic orientation of our culture and call it godly and good, call it a blessing from God, when it is often better seen as a temptation of the devil. By placing the emphasis where they do, prosperity gospel preachers neglect the cut-and-thrust of New Testament warnings against such matters, warnings that are spoken over and over again. And let me add that pursuing answers to these sorts of questions is not like playing a game of trivial pursuit. It's actually a matter of spiritual life and death. Indeed, how one relates to the material world and wealth and health issues reveals where one's ultimate loyalties and priorities lie.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 10-11.

To avoid any “selective misuse of the biblical texts” Witherington adopts a “canonical or whole-Bible approach” that requires one “to understand the social as well as the literary context” of pertinent passages. He comments:

What is interesting about a comprehensive look at the Old Testament and early Jewish literature on the matter of wealth and possessions is that in fact the Jewish literature is not simply all in favor of wealth and abundance. And the New Testament is not simply all against having possessions and some prosperity in life. The evidence is more mixed and complex.<sup>43</sup>

This assertion is demonstrably true, and it is one of the reasons why Witherington dialogues with so many other theologians throughout his work including “liberation theologian Justo Gonzalez” the “evangelical Craig Blomberg” and, especially, the Christian ethicist, Sondra Wheeler.<sup>44</sup> Witherington wisely draws upon Wheeler’s book *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* to summarize “what the Old Testament says about wealth and abundance” as well as “the basic themes on wealth in the New Testament.” Regarding the former, he, citing Wheeler, enumerates the following four categories.

1. *Wealth as an occasion for idolatry* (Deut. 32:10-18); Isa. 2:6-8; 3:16-24; Jer. 5:7; Ezek. 7:19-20; 16:15-22; Hos. 2:5-9; Amos 6:4-7)
2. *Wealth as the fruit of injustice* (Isa. 3:14-15; 10:1-3; Mic. 6:10-12; Jer. 5:27-28; Amos 2:6; 4:1-2)
3. *Wealth as a sign of faithfulness* (Lev. 26:3-10; Deut. 11:13-15; Isa. 54:11-12; 60:9-16; Jer. 33:6-9)
4. *Wealth as the reward for hard labor* (Prov. 10-21)

And, regarding the latter Testament, he similar cites:

1. *Wealth as a stumbling block*. (Luke 18:18-30)

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<sup>43</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 15.

2. *Wealth as a competing object of devotion...*(Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13)
3. *Wealth as a resource for human needs...*(Rom. 15:25-27; Gal. 6:6)
4. *Wealth as a symptom of economic injustice* (Luke 1:51-53; 4:18-19; 6:21; 16:19- 26)<sup>45</sup>

Wheeler's impact upon Witherington is especially apparent in the penultimate chapter of his book titled, "Towards a New Testament Theology of Money, Stewardship, and Giving." There he underscores the importance of his approach by appealing to Wheeler once more.

Sondra Wheeler remarks that it is critical to take into account the whole of the New Testament canon, with all its variety. One of the reasons for a comprehensive approach is that if we take situation-specific injunctions and attempt to universalize them, we quickly run into conflict with other New Testament imperatives that are equally important. For instance, imagine someone who takes Luke 12:33 ("sell your possessions and give to the poor") to be incumbent on all Christians in every situation, literally follows it, and then meets the commandment "do not neglect hospitality" (Heb. 13:2). If one has no home or possessions, how can one offer hospitality? In other words, a canonical approach suggests that there must be a balance in the way we evaluate the evidence, not universalizing a calling or demand that may be meant for particular persons, living in particular circumstances and places.

Wheeler is also correct in her assertion that much of the orientation towards money and wealth in the New Testament carries forward Old Testament assumptions about the subject. First is the assumption that God is the creator and owner of all things. Second, God's creatures are not owners but only stewards of material things, even when one has worked for them and earned them in one sense. Third, we find in the Old Testament the conviction that human beings are fallen, and that the internal battles with things like greed are ongoing; one cannot afford to be naïve about that. And finally, in light of the multitudinous warnings in the Bible about wealth (repeatedly associated with idolatry and apostasy), a believer must be wary and take a cautious approach to the issues of money and possessions.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 13-15.

<sup>46</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 141-142.

Indeed, as I previously indicated, there is a remarkable level of agreement amongst these scholars (whom I take to be representative) regarding a biblical view of earthly wealth. But what is my own understanding? Unsurprisingly, it is not revolutionary. Here is a succinct three-point summarization. First, God is the Creator and, in the highest sense, everything belongs to Him (Job 41:11). Second, God blesses us with both spiritual and material possessions, and we are merely stewards of these gifts (Acts 17:25; Gal 2:10; Jas 1:17; 1 Pet 4:10). Third, material possessions are not intrinsically wrong (Acts 5:4). Instead, biblically speaking, what matters is, how we acquired them, what we are doing with them, and the emphasis we are placing upon them (Mic 2:2; Matt 6:24; Acts 8:20; Eph 4:28). To adapt a cliché we might say, “There is nothing wrong with having possessions as long as our possessions don’t possess us.” Indeed, idolatry always has been, and always will be, at the heart of this matter. This, in short, is my understanding of a biblical view of earthly wealth, generally.<sup>47</sup> In the next section, I will set forth a biblical view of earthly inheritances, specifically.

### **Biblical Investigation – Earthly Inheritance**

Although I am now narrowing my focus, I must still be selective. The Bible has much to say about the broad topic of inheritance. It has less to say about earthly inheritances. And it has even less to say about how one might best navigate the many issues associated with the reception (or non-reception) of such an inheritance. As with any interpretive endeavor, contextualization is key. For example, it is evident that, for many modern people, the acquisition of wealth is at the heart of inheritance-related

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<sup>47</sup> Should the reader desire to delve more deeply into my thoughts upon this topic, and their application, I refer them to the manuscripts of two recent sermons I have preached titled, “The Poor Economy and the Economy of the Poor” and “A Simple Life” located in Appendix A and B.

matters. But this was not necessarily the case in ancient Israel. Their situation is not our own. Nevertheless, we cautiously proceed fully convinced of the truthfulness of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Earlier, I investigated the underlying Hebrew and Greek words related to the topic of inheritance. I considered their frequency, derivation, and usage throughout the biblical corpus. At this time, drawing upon that work, I will highlight, and discuss, certain passages that can provide practical guidance for contemporary Christians and, especially, for members of the Uniontown church of Christ relative to our topic.

It has been established that, within the pages of the Old Testament, the majority of passages that speak about an inheritance speak specifically of the land of Canaan. For example, when pleading with the LORD, Moses referred to the promise the LORD had made to the Patriarchs saying, “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” (Exod 32:13; cf. Gen 26:4-5). This inheritance, or Promised Land, has been, and will continue to be, an endless source of controversy. But, for our limited purpose, I wish to point out that what should not be controversial is that the Land was a gift. Recall Moses’ “peptalk” to the Israelites just prior to their taking possession of that present:

“Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you...Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God. He will destroy them

and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you. “Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. “Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. (Deut 9:1-6)

At the right time, God used Israel as an instrument of destruction to punish the wicked inhabitants of Canaan (cf. Gen 15:13-16). Additionally, God repeatedly emphasized that Israel’s reception of the Land has nothing to do with their own goodness; and everything to do with His goodness. In other words, God owed them nothing. Canaan was a gift and, for that inheritance, the LORD’s people were to be grateful. In fact, earlier in this same discourse they had been warned:

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land...“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today...Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (Deut 8:7-18)

The Israelites, quite literally, fought and died to conquer the Promised Land. Yet, here, Yahweh emphasizes that it is He Who made their acquisition possible.

Truly, in the highest sense, God is the rightful owner of all things and this includes the Promised Land. For example, about the former we read, “The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” (Ps 24:1 cf. 1 Cor 10:6) and about the latter it is written, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.” (Lev 25:23).

This verse underscores the idea that the Israelites are stewards of the land, living on it by God's grace and command...The laws of the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year, as outlined in Leviticus 25 further illustrate God's ownership. Every seventh year, the land was to observe a Sabbath rest, and every fiftieth year, the Jubilee, was a time when the land was to be returned to its original owners. These practices served as reminders that the land ultimately belongs to God and that His people are to trust in His provision...The prophets frequently reminded Israel of God's ownership of the land, warning them of the consequences of disobedience. In Jeremiah 2:7, God laments, "I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and bounty, but you came and defiled My land; you made My inheritance detestable."<sup>48</sup>

It is a great blessing to be a steward of God's gifts. But with that great blessing comes great responsibility. (This will become all the more apparent when we move to the New Testament.)

Additionally, in the Old Testament, there are numerous laws associated with matters of earthly inheritance. For example, one resource relates:

In ancient Israel possessions were passed on to the living sons of a father, but the eldest son received a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Reuben lost preeminence because of incest with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22; 49:4; 1 Chron. 5:1), and Esau surrendered his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:29-34). These examples show that possession of this double portion was not absolute. Sons of concubines did not inherit unless adopted. Jacob's sons by the maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah (Gen. 30:3-13) inherited (Gen. 49) because these offspring were adopted by Rachel and Leah. Sarai promised to adopt the offspring of her maid Hagar when she gave Hagar to Abram (Gen. 16:2) but went back on that promise after Isaac's birth (Gen. 21:10). Women were not to inherit from their fathers except in the absence of a son (Num. 27:1-11). Before this ruling from the Lord, if a man had no offspring, the inheritance went to his brothers, to his father's brothers, or to his next kinsman.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "God's Ownership of the Land." *Bible Hub*. Accessed February 25, 2025. [https://biblehub.com/topical/g/god's\\_ownership\\_of\\_the\\_land.htm](https://biblehub.com/topical/g/god's_ownership_of_the_land.htm).

<sup>49</sup> Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 817.

I cite this source for two reasons. First, I want to demonstrate an awareness of the complexities associated with Old Testament inheritance laws.<sup>50</sup> Second, I want to acknowledge that there are some passages, within the Old Testament, that do indeed touch upon the “legal transmission of property after death.”<sup>51</sup> That is to say, the way in which we typically think about an inheritance.

Regarding earthly inheritances, there is one pertinent passage within the Old Testament that expresses an overt cynicism. The author of Ecclesiastes<sup>52</sup> (i.e., the Preacher) laments:

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. (Eccl 2:18-21)

However, in contrast the Preacher’s bleak outlook, more often we discover gems of wisdom in the pages of the Hebrew Bible. “A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers (Prov 17:2).” “An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end (Prov 20:21).” “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous (Prov 13:22 ).” And, “Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance (Prov 28:10).” There are even optimistic passages which, while drawing upon

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<sup>50</sup> However, I will not delve into these more deeply for to do so would not be in keeping with the narrow scope of my investigation.

<sup>51</sup> Brand, Draper, and England. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 817.

<sup>52</sup> Traditionally, the author has been understood to be King Solomon.

the imagery of the Promised Land, take on a more spiritual, even, eschatological tone.

For example, in the 37th Psalm it is written:

For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace...The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives; for those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off...For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever (Ps 37:9-11, 21-22, 28-29 cf. Isa 57:13).

These words, coupled with the following quotation, prepare us for our investigation of the New Testament.

The uses of inheritance language in the OT vary widely within the context of the history of Israel. These contexts move from a concern for personal property to theological affirmations of Canaan as Israel's inheritance, of Israel as Yahweh's inheritance, and of Yahweh as Israel's inheritance.

Some later Jewish writings can view the Law as Israel's inheritance (e.g., Sir 24:23; 1 En. 99:14). Some speak of inheriting life or eternal life (e.g. Pss. Sol. 14:7; 1 En. 40:0; cf. 2 En. 50:2, 2 Bar. 44:13). Philo can see inheritance as a mystical unity with God (in Heres). This variety shows how different historical contexts produce a rich diversity in understandings of inheritance in the historical background to the NT.<sup>53</sup>

As we move from the Old to the New Testament we notice that there are few passages that explicitly speak about earthly inheritances. In the Synoptics we find the Parable of the Tenants (Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18) and, although some details vary, all agree that the tenants murder the owner of the vineyard's son in order to take his inheritance. Matthew adds that for that crime those "wretches" were to receive a "miserable death (Matt 21:38)." In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is accosted by a person who

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<sup>53</sup> Paul L. Hammer, "Inheritance (NT)." In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: J-J*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 415-417. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992. Theology and Religion Online. Accessed August 14, 2023. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780300261899-0476>.

demands that He intercede in a familial conflict over an earthly inheritance. The Lord questions the petitioner, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” and then warns, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Christ then relates the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21), which concludes with these sobering words, “This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Still later in this same Gospel, Jesus relates the well-known Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Therein a man, who had two sons, is approached by the younger who demands, “Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.” Beyond these, there are a few others passages in the New Testament that speak about the Old Testament inheritance of Canaan (i.e., the earthly Promised Land - Acts 7:5, 13:19, Heb 11:8) retrospectively. The Anchor Bible Dictionary succinctly summarizes all other instances of “inheritance” in this way:

The theological use of inheritance language in the NT exhibits a tension between the present and the future. For Paul, Jesus Christ already fulfills the inheritance promised to Abraham and makes persons of faith heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, even though there remains a kingdom to inherit in the future. Ephesians points to a future inheritance that is the cosmic unity of all things in Christ, while simultaneously Jew and gentiles already are joint heirs in the Church, and their unity witnesses already to that ultimate unity. The Synoptics speak futuristically of inheriting eternal life, with Matthew especially giving inheritance language a strong eschatological emphasis. For all synoptic writers, Jesus is the heir of the vineyard inheritance, now understood as the reign or kingdom of God. The reign of God is both present and future; it calls for present faithfulness, but its full realization is in the future. Unlike the other synoptic writers, Luke sees this realization as occurring already within the Church. For Hebrews, the content of the inheritance is the future heavenly city of God, and it is by the covenantal death of Jesus, the heir of all things, that this inheritance will be effected. In 1 Peter, the content also is future, “an inheritance...kept in heaven for you,” a “living hope”

made effective by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (cf. Rev. 21:7 for an additional future reference to inheritance).<sup>54</sup>

### **Practical Application**

Based upon my research, I will now set forth seven (synthesized) suggestions for practical application.

First, we need to know that God owns everything. The Bible declares this (Ps 24:1; 1 Cor 10:26). It also implies this (Gen 1:1; Heb 3:4). However, we often lose sight of this, and, especially, whenever we face difficult times. The Patriarch Job illustrates this well for, over the course of his eponymous volume, he accuses the LORD of two great evils and, God's questions, and His absolute assertion near the end of the book, answers both charges.<sup>55</sup> In the first place, Job charged the Lord with, "unlawful appropriation." That is to say, he charged God with taking what did not belong to Him. Job suggests that Almighty God has no right to take away his happy life, his possessions, his family, and his health. But, against this, God declares, "Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me. (Job 41:10b-11). The second charge Job brought against God was that of injustice. Regarding that charge, God replied with questions that were designed to demonstrate that Job was both impotent and ignorant. The point is clear. We are weak, but God is all powerful. We cannot see all ends, but God can. Thus, God makes the best decisions possible because He knows everything; we do not.

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<sup>54</sup> Paul L. Hammer, "Inheritance (NT)." In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 415-417.

<sup>55</sup> Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, "Poetry in the Courtroom: Job 38-41." *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (1987): 185-204.

Second, because God owns everything, we are merely stewards. This is suggested in the first chapter of the Bible when Adam and Eve are granted dominion over “every living thing that moves on the earth (Gen 1:28).” In the New Testament we are told that, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above (Jas 1:17a).” Furthermore, God grants us “life and breath and everything (Acts 17:25).” And, as Christians, we know that we are not our own for we “were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20).” Beyond this, Jesus relates a parable that indicates that even after we have done all that God commands us to do; we are still “unworthy servants.” In other words, God owes us nothing, not even a “thank you (Luke 17:7-10).” And, yet, we should give thanks in all circumstances for that is His will for us (1 Thess 5:18).

Third, an earthly inheritance should be looked upon as a gift. We have already seen that the physical inheritance the Israelites received, namely, the earthly Promised Land, was a gift from God. This idea extends to the New Testament for our spiritual inheritance in Christ, namely, the heavenly Promised Land (Heb 4:8-11, 11:8-11, 13-16, 39-40), our salvation, is also presented as a gift from God (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7).

Of course, I realize that many consider earthly inheritances to be something earned, not given. For example, they are convinced that children who do more for their parents in life, should receive a greater portion of their parents’ possessions at death. This view is common, and it is only natural; it is definitely not supernatural for it is certainly shortsighted. Its proponents may fiercely, and forcefully, argue that it is about what is “fair.” But, biblically speaking, I am convinced that they are working from a flawed premise, and, possibly, a sense of entitlement.

Consider, for example, the Parable of the Laborers (Matt 20:1-16). Therein, the “kingdom of heaven” is likened to “a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” The laborers agree upon their wages and go to work. However, over the course of the day, the master continues to hire additional laborers. When the time comes for them to receive their wages, the master pays all of them equally. Those who had worked all day are resentful. But the master tells them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?”

The pertinence of this passage is apparent. In short, those who look upon an earthly inheritance as a gift (i.e., something which they did not earn) will, more likely, joyfully receive it, and bear no ill will toward other recipients of it. However, those who look upon an earthly inheritance as something they have earned will, more likely, begrudgingly receive it and bear ill will toward other recipients of it. In other words, if they do not receive what they believe they are owed, anger and resentment will follow. This, I argue, largely arises from their mistaken notion that they, and not the “nearly, or dearly, departed,” have the right to determine the distribution of another’s possessions.

Fourth, what we do, and say, and think regarding an earthly inheritance really does matter. It is wrong to kill a person to take their inheritance (Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18). It is also wrong to defraud them of the same (Matt 10:19, 1 Cor 6:8). But is it not also wrong to slander, and accuse, and think evil thoughts of others (Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; Eph 4:31)? Of course it is. In the book of 1 Timothy we are told:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Tim 6:10).

These words ring loudly. However, those who have made money their God refuse to hear them. As Christ declared, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13).”

That said, as Blomberg, Brueggemann, and Witherington indicated, Scripture never treats money as something that is intrinsically wrong. What truly matters is how we acquired it (whether honestly or dishonestly), the emphasis we are placing upon it (Has it become an idol? – Col 3:5 covetousness = idolatry), and what we are doing with it. This leads to another suggestion.

Fifth, we should be charitable. This is a constant theme of Scripture. Under the Law of Moses “the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow” were cared for via the practice of gleaning (Deut 24:19-22) and they, along with the Levites, orphans, and widows, were allowed to partake of the tithe (Deut 26). In the New Testament we are urged through both the words and deeds of our Lord, and His followers, to “remember the poor (Mark 14:7; John 12:8; Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10; Jas 2:5).” Furthermore, Jesus warns us in the Parable of the Rich Fool:

"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night

your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:15b-21).

But, are we rich toward God? And, are we laying up treasure for ourselves here on this earth or in Heaven? If one wonders how they may do so, Jesus explains the process just a few verses later: "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:33-34)."

Many have considered Christ's challenge to be too difficult. In fact, when the Rich Young Ruler was challenged in a similar fashion we read, "Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matt 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)." But, as we discovered earlier, a complete view of New Testament teaching provides additional insight. Notably, some gave up everything to follow the Lord while others did not and, yet, they followed Him all the same. (e.g., Mark 10:28-30 vs. Luke 19:1-10). In short, everyone does not serve the Lord in the same way.

Sixth, this world is not all there is. God's word repeatedly indicates that there is more to life than just this life. Thus, no matter how difficult our lives become, whether physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or, even financially, we have a certain hope. For example, when speaking about the hardship that he endured as a servant of Christ, the Apostle Paul reassures us with these words:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our

earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor 4:16-5:1).

Elsewhere, this same Apostle contrasts the present with the future age saying:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life (1 Tim 6:17-19 (cf. Eph 4:28)).

The wealth of this world is fleeting, and this includes any earthly inheritance that we may receive, as such, we need to invest in the things that will last. Indeed:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matt 13:44-46).

Moreover, in the final book of the Bible, Christ supplies this counsel:

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see (Rev 3:17-18).

His words prepare us for the final suggestion.

Seventh, we will give an account. As it is written:

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb 4:11-13).

Although I have accomplished my goals for this chapter, it may be observed that there is one particular passage that has not yet been addressed. It is a pericope that pertains to both material possessions and spiritual blessings. Blomberg asserts that this “parable is arguably the most perplexing of all that Jesus told and is an exegetical

hornets' nest."<sup>56</sup> However, since I judge it to be as relevant to my project as it is difficult to understand, I will now "kick the hornets' nest."<sup>57</sup>

## **Exegetical Excursus – The Parable of the Unjust Steward**

### **The Prelude**

In this section I will, primarily, advance a literal-grammatical interpretation of the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13).<sup>58</sup> First, I will provide a close analysis of this passage. Additionally, in keeping with the relatively small scope of this undertaking, I shall employ an intertextual interpretive approach that will be confined to the Gospel of Luke. Afterwards, I will demonstrate this pericope's applicability to my research project.

### **The Predicament (Luke 16:1-3)**

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. (2) And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' (3) And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg (Luke 16:1-3).

As this parable begins we are introduced to a certain rich man (ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν πλούσιος). In Luke's Gospel the rich are spoken of on many occasions, usually in a negative light. Jesus pronounces a woe upon them (Luke 6:24), they contribute to the offering box out of their abundance (Luke 21:1), and a rich ruler is saddened by Jesus'

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<sup>56</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Appendix H contains the sermon manuscript that arose from this in-depth analysis.

<sup>58</sup> Stylianopoulos implies that this was the preferred, though not exclusive, approach of many ancient interpreters including Athanasios, Cyril, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Kyros, and St. Basil the Great. He says that Basil "is arguably the best example of a sober biblical interpretation in both pastoral and doctrinal writings." – Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective Volume One: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics* (Brookline, Massachusetts) Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, 118-119.

instruction to, “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” This event prompts the Lord to declare, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:18-25).” Despite this general tendency, in the very next chapter, we are introduced to a rich chief tax collector, Zaccheus, whose humble, penitent, and sacrificial words and deeds precede a different declaration, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham (Luke 19:1-10).” Evidently, this rich man, who was small of stature, passed through the eye of that needle. Beyond these instances, within this Gospel, the rich are spoken of in three, or four, parables. There is a passing reference to rich neighbors in the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Luke 14:12) and a certain rich man is condemned in both the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21), and the account, or parable, of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Given these particulars, we might be suspicious of the rich man’s character in Luke 16:1. However, although he is never commended within this pericope, he is also never condemned. Indeed, it is with his servant that most interpreters find fault.

The rich man has a manager, a steward, who is, reportedly, wasting his possessions. When the charges are brought to the rich man, he does not investigate them, but simply decides to terminate the employment of his servant. Outside of this pericope, within the Gospel of Luke, the word for manager (οἰκονόμος) only appears on one other occasion. In that place, while explicating a parable, Jesus asks, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager (οἰκονόμος), whom his master (κύριος) will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant (δοῦλος) whom

his master (κύριος) will find so doing when he comes (Luke 12:42-43).” Since the manager of this passage is also referred to as a servant, some understand the manager of Luke 16:1ff to be a servant/slave as well. This interpretation seems likely enough, inasmuch as the rich man of Luke 16:1-9 is referred to as master (lord - κύριός) by both the manager (16:3) and the narrator (in 16:5, and, arguably, in 16:8).

Although some may consider the actions of the rich man to be unfair, it is more commonly surmised that the manager was truly guilty of wasting his master’s possessions. The evidence for this is twofold. First, there is no indication given in the passage that the charges were contested. Second, in verse 8, Jesus Himself characterizes the man as a (the) “dishonest manager” (τὸν οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀδικίας). As is characteristic of Luke’s style (Luke 7:39; 9:3; 12:17, 19, 45; 15:17; 18:4) a soliloquy emerges in verse 3. There the manager contemplates his options and devises a plan.

### **The Plan & The Procedure (Luke 16:4-7)**

I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ (5) So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ (6) He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ (7) Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty (Luke 16:4-7).’

The manager acts in order to secure his future. That much is clear. However, what is not clear is whether his actions are immoral. This section is understood in various ways.

Some believe that the steward is removing dishonest interest that had been placed upon the goods, either by his master or, by himself. The former reading casts the steward as a “Robin Hood” type figure. The latter suggestion is well-expressed in these words:

The parable of the dishonest steward has to be understood in the light of the Palestinian custom of agents acting on behalf of their masters and the usurious practices common to such agents. The dishonesty of the steward consisted in the squandering of his master's property (Lk 16:1) and not in any subsequent graft. The master commends the dishonest steward who has forgone his own usurious commission on the business transaction by having the debtors write new notes that reflected only the real amount owed the master (i.e., minus the steward's profit).<sup>59</sup>

Others believe that the steward is simply stealing from his master. Augustine, for example, preferred this approach:

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ present this parable to us? He surely did not approve of that cheat of a servant who cheated his master, stole from him and did not make it up from his own pocket. On top of that, he also did some extra pilfering. He caused his master further loss, in order to prepare a little nest of quiet and security for himself after he lost his job.<sup>60</sup>

It is inferred by Augustine that, because the steward was accused of "wasting his master's possessions" (v. 1) prior to these words and characterized by Christ as "dishonest" (v. 8) after these words, then what he is doing here is, necessarily, dishonest. However, this does not follow. The manager could, in fact, be acting lawfully, which leads us to another understanding.

Some believe that the steward is simply foregoing his own, lawful, commission to ingratiate himself to his master's debtors. In other words, there is no dishonesty being displayed at this point, only shrewdness.

Regardless of one's preferred approach to this portion of the text, the parable still makes perfect sense for Jesus reveals the point in the passages that follow.

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<sup>59</sup> *The International Student Bible for Catholics New American Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 1171-1172.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Westmont: Intervarsity Press, 1998-2010), Sermon 359a.10, Augustine.

### **The Praise & The Point (Luke 16:8-9)**

The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. (9) And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings (Luke 16:8-9).

Although it could be argued that the master (κύριος) who commended the dishonest manager was Jesus Himself, I do not think this interpretation is likely for the following reasons. First, within this section, the term master/lord (κύριος) has already been employed three times. In all these instances the immediate context indicates that the manager's earthly master is in view (see Luke 16:3, 5). Secondly, while it is grammatically, and syntactically, possible that the κύριος of Luke 16:8 is Jesus, if such is the case, it provides an awkward break within this discourse. Does Jesus suddenly shift to speaking about Himself in the third person? Or, is this Luke providing an explanatory remark? If so, where does his parenthetical comment conclude and where do Jesus' comments resume? Is Luke the one saying, "And I tell you..." in verse 9 or is that Jesus? Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, 16:8b looks back to 16:8a. The text reads, "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." Contextually, "the sons of this world" seem to be the characters with which this parable has been concerned. It definitely includes the dishonest manager. It, likely, includes the rich man. It is reasonable for the rich man and the dishonest manager to be coupled together (in 16:8a), and categorized, as "sons of this world (in 16:8b)" who belong to the same "generation." However, it is not at all reasonable to couple Christ together with the dishonest manager and categorize Him in the same way.

Several additional items merit comment. Regarding the initial sentence, Delbert Burkett has said,

The central question is why the master would commend the actions of his steward. Traditionally, exegetes have distinguished between the steward's dishonesty and his prudence: the master commends him for the latter, not the former. This interpretation is accurate as far as it goes, but it does not explain why the master would commend him for a prudent action if his action were also ethically dubious.<sup>61</sup>

This difficulty is often alleged. However, it is not insurmountable. Employers fire employees. They always have and they always will. It is possible, though perhaps not probable, that the master was so excited to be rid of his dishonest servant that he did not begrudge him one last graft. Then again, as we have already posited, it is possible that the actions undertaken in 16:4-7 are not dishonest. If such were the case then the master simply recognized that his ex-employee had used his last lawful transactions, in his master's service, to secure his own future. The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

Another item that should be addressed is the reference to “unrighteous wealth” in verse 9 (μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας). Many argue that the words necessarily refer to “wealth gained illegally.” However, those who examine the context will discover that Luke employs these words again just two verses later (v. 11 - εἰ οὖν ἐν τῷ ἀδίκῳ μαμωνᾷ πιστοὶ οὐκ ἐγένεσθε, τὸ ἀληθινὸν τίς ὑμῖν πιστεύσει;). Clearly, unrighteous wealth is all the wealth of this world, inasmuch as it is contrasted with that which is the true (wealth), namely the riches of heaven.

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<sup>61</sup> Delbert Burkett, “The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward (Luke 16:1-9): A Prudent Use of Mammon,” *New Testament Studies*, (2018) 331.

Following the parable, Jesus makes an observation (Luke 16:8b) and provides an exhortation (16:9). The lesson seems clear, but many misunderstand His words. Here is an illustrative example provided by one, Anthony Giambrone.

The complexities of the parable of the Unjust Steward (16:18) are notorious. A diachronic fixation on pre-Gospel strata, however, has greatly exacerbated the interpretative issues. Synchronically, the point is much easier to approximate: “There was once an Enron executive who got caught, but he cooked the books fast and made a soft landing.” If this is indeed the thrust of the story, as most commentators ultimately agree, a whole range of curious problems may be set aside.<sup>62</sup>

But is this really “the thrust of the story?” Giambrone insightfully continues.

The only real question for our purpose is whether a “*non-monetary*” meaning should be upheld: be it an eschatological call “to think strenuously and act boldly to meet the crisis” (Dodd) or a moralizing counsel about planning ahead (Jillicher). If the merits of such non-monetary readings are interesting, their value, nonetheless, still lies in the quest for Jesus’ *ipsissima verba* or some stage of pre-Gospel tradition, so that Luke’s canonical context is ignored. In the Gospel as it stands, by contrast, the story is plainly interpreted about the use of *mammon* (16:9-13) - even if it is also very much about preparing for a coming judgment. This canonical setting is our present interest, and *Luke’s* moral(bracketing the historical Jesus) can thus be read along these lines: “If crooks are smart enough to grease some palms and ensure their own final self-interest in this world, shouldn’t the good guys know how to move their money to secure an easy retirement in the world to come?”

Although Giambrone’s word choice is a bit colloquial, his assessment is entirely beneficial. Jesus’ words in Luke 16:9 are indeed eschatological. Again, He says, “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” Christ is telling us to use the wealth with which we are blessed in this life to make friends so that when that wealth fails our friends can receive us into the life of the world to come. Additionally, based

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<sup>62</sup> Anthony Giambrone, ““Friends In Heavenly Habitations” (Luke 16:9): Charity, Repentance, And Luke’s Resurrection Reversal,” *Revue Biblique*, (2013) 538.

upon His words in Luke 14:12 (cf. Luke 6:20) charitable acts toward the poor are particularly in view. Note the similarity:

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. (13) But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14) and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:12-14).”

Although some, such as D.R. Fletcher, have maintained that Jesus’ words in Luke 16:9 are best understood as deeply ironic, others, such as Giambrone, contend:

This hyper-emphasis on the wickedness of mammon fails to convince, misunderstands the role of righteous self-concern, and seems unacquainted with the high value placed on almsgiving - both in Second Temple Judaism at large and in the Third Gospel specifically (e.g. Luke 11:41; 12:33). The solution here is to let the offense of commending self-interest stand, reading the steward’s behavior as a secular exemplum, a kind of natural analogue and a fortiori argument for the “sons of light” enlightened about their final end in the resurrection. They are happy who know “you can’t take it with you” and make provision for themselves beyond their day of reckoning. Luke 16:9 appeals to a familiar line of reasoning. Enacting righteous deeds with one’s money “is like making a bank deposit to an account in heaven.” This idea is well documented in Second Temple Judaism, and is prominently on display in the Gospels.”<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, to borrow the words of Christ once more, “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:33-34).”

Having completed my analysis, this, then, is my understanding of the Parable of the Dishonest Manager.

The allegedly wasteful, and definitely dishonest, worldly manager, when he learned that he was going to be jobless, used the means at his disposal (whether lawfully or unlawfully) to make friends in order to secure his future in this life.

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<sup>63</sup> Giambrone, ““Friends In Heavenly Habitations,” 539-541.

How much more so should godly people, use the means at their disposal (since they know it is fleeting) to make friends in this life (e.g., by being kind to the poor) so that they may secure their future in the next life.

The reader may notice that my reading adopts a lesser to greater approach (i.e., *qal wahomer*). Turrel discerns, but does not identify, this when he writes about this parable saying:

It's like the story of the unrighteous judge, who won't give a widow justice, and so the widow keeps coming back and pestering him. Finally, he gives in to get her to leave him alone. If a bad judge is like that, how much more will God do for those who ask him. And Jesus uses the example of a parent: how many parents would give a child asking for bread a rock instead? If we who are evil know how to give good gifts, he says, how much more then will God give good gifts.<sup>64</sup>

Although many maintain that this parable concludes in verse 9, there are some who see an additional conclusion, or two, in the verses that follow.

### **The (Possibly) Protracted Point (Luke 16:10-13)**

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. (11) If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? (12) And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? (13) No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:10-13).”

In this section, Christ begins by proclaiming a principle. It is interesting that the only other time the word “faithful” appears in the Gospel of Luke is with reference to a “wise manager (Luke 12:42)” and a “good servant (Luke 19:17).” This is no coincidence. Several words within this section are also found in the preceding verses. The dishonest are mentioned, as are unrighteous wealth, and true riches. However, it is impossible to determine whether this is the proper conclusion of the Parable of the Unjust Steward or

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<sup>64</sup> James F. Turrel, “The Dishonest Manager,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 55:4, (2012) 415.

just a mere expansion of its theme. One final observation is worth mentioning. Here, again, Jesus' penchant for lesser to greater arguments is manifested. This may very well buttress my qal wahomer reading, but further exposition would move beyond the confines on this task.

### **Applicability**

The perspective, principles, and practices of Christians should arise from the word of God. Christ is our life (Colossians 3:4), and this means that we should think, and speak, and act differently than the people of the world. In the words of Cyril of Alexandria:

Let those of us who possess earthly wealth open our hearts to those who are in need. Let us show ourselves faithful and obedient to the laws of God. Let us be followers of our Lord's will in those things that are from the outside and not our own. Let us do this so that we may receive what is our own, that holy and admirable beauty that God forms in people's souls, making them like himself, according to what we originally were.<sup>65</sup>

My research project ascertains, and advocates, a biblical view regarding worldly wealth, generally, and earthly inheritances, specifically. My chief aim is to provide spiritual guidance to contemporary Christians and, especially, members of the Uniontown church of Christ as they navigate matters pertaining to earthly inheritances. In light of this, I believe that the applicability of the Parable of the Unjust Steward to my thesis is apparent for, at least, three reasons.

First, the perspective, or worldview, conveyed within this parable indicates that there is more to life than just this life. There is no earthly inheritance that is greater than

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Westmont: Intervarsity Press, 1998-2010), Homily 109, Cyril of Alexandria.

our heavenly inheritance, so we should not be like Esau and sell our birthright (Heb 12:14ff). We must not miss heaven for the world.

Second, one principle that may be derived from the parable is this, our time here on this earth is short. Therefore, we need to make the most of the time that God gives us. “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away...So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Ps 90:10-12).

Third, this parable alludes to the practice of being generous towards others, for example, by the giving of alms to the poor, so that we might be blessed in the life of the world to come. It is not just about what we believe; it is also about the way we live.

Again, as the Apostle Paul tells Timothy:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life (1 Tim 6:17-19).

## **Conclusion**

Once more, I began this chapter by examining the frequency, derivation, and usage of the various terms that are translated as “inheritance” within the Bible. Next, following a largely chronological approach, and drawing upon the works of others, I explored relevant portions of both the Old and New Testament to ascertain a biblical view regarding wealth, generally. Then, narrowing the focus of my investigation, I ascertained

a biblical view of earthly inheritances, specifically. This, in turn, allowed me to set forth seven suggestions for practical application. They are as follows:

1. God owns everything.
2. We are merely stewards.
3. An earthly inheritance should be looked upon as a gift.
4. What we do, say, and think regarding earthly inheritances really does matter.
5. We should be charitable.
6. This world is not all there is.
7. We will give an account.

Finally, in order to be thorough, and because of its relevance, I provided an in-depth analysis of the Parable of the Unjust Steward and demonstrated its applicability to this project.

In the next chapter I will present my research to a select group of people within my congregation. I will then interview them for two reasons. First, I want to understand any barriers to peace, and sources of conflict, that they have encountered while navigating earthly inheritances issues so that I might more effectively minister to them and others. Second, I want to discover questions that my independent analysis has failed to adequately address. Following the presentation and interviews, I will prepare a sermon, with an accompanying PowerPoint, to present to all members of the Uniontown church of Christ. My message will have specific goals, unknown to anyone but myself. However, after the message is completed, I will evaluate its effectiveness in meeting my goals via a congregational survey.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Project Overview**

The goal of this project was to prepare a biblical, theological, and pastoral resource (i.e., a sermon) that expounds upon a Christian understanding of wealth, generally, and earthly inheritances, specifically. The occasion for this research arose when I was admitted into the Doctor of Ministry Program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. However, the reason I undertook this particular task was because I perceived a pressing need. I looked outward at the World and considered its many conflicts especially those which, I judged, were likely to increase. I then looked inward, reflecting upon my own experience. I concluded that the World was saying much about how individuals ought to navigate matters of earthly inheritances, but the Church was saying very little.

Thus, I set out to rectify this deficiency. I began, as most do, simply by speaking with others about my interest. Since I am a preacher, I asked questions like, “Have you ever heard anyone preach a sermon on the topic of earthly inheritances” or, more pointedly, “When was the last time you heard a sermon on earthly inheritances?” When people responded, as they usually did, by indicating that they had never heard a sermon on that topic I would ask whether they thought the subject would be worthy of exploration. The answer was always a resounding, “Yes.” Family, friends, and acquaintances, people from all walks of life, encouraged me in this interesting, and applicable, endeavor. In time, I prepared my research project proposal. I then presented it to my colleagues and instructors. Here too, I received much encouragement, but my plans were not simply rubber-stamped. There were many valid questions, comments, and criticisms levied. However, eventually, after no less than a half a dozen revisions to my

proposal, the path upon which I was to travel emerged. It consisted of the following steps.

### **Project Implementation**

First, since I was developing a biblical resource for the Uniontown church of Christ, it was apparent that I ought to begin by examining the Scriptures. Initially, I confined myself to the Protestant canon and, more specifically, the English Standard Version of the Bible. (This is the translation from which I, customarily, preach to members of my congregation.) It seemed reasonable to begin by examining every instance of the words, “inherit,” “inheritance,” and “inheritances” within the Bible, and so I did. Of course, knowing that God’s word was not originally written in English, I delved more deeply into the text by performing a semantic analysis to discover the underlying Hebrew and Greek terms within the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament along with their meanings. By focusing upon the frequency, derivation, and usage of these terms I was able to sharpen the focus of my inquiry.

Second, since I was developing a theological resource for the Uniontown church of Christ, it was prudent for me to also examine the extra-biblical compositions of others. Although, as I have noted, there has been a distinct lack of Christian literature produced by theologians throughout the ages regarding the specific topic of earthly inheritances, there has been no lack of literature produced by the same regarding the more general topic of earthly wealth. Thus, I examined the writings of several contemporary authors who undertook the arduous task of surveying the entire Bible to arrive at a biblical theology of money and possessions. Since all these scholars were drawing from the same source, I was not surprised that there was a remarkable level of agreement. I combined

their views with my own to arrive at a biblical view of earthly wealth, generally. I then narrowed the focus of my inquiry to passages of Scripture that dealt with earthly inheritances, specifically. I sought perspectives, principles, and practices that might provide practical application for contemporary Christians. I found many, and I set forth seven, before conducting an in-depth exegetical excursus on the Parable of the Unjust Steward (a.k.a. the Dishonest Manager).

Third, since I was developing a pastoral resource for the Uniontown church of Christ, it was necessary for me to include the congregation in the process. I accomplished this interaction through the following four phases.

In phase one I formally introduced my congregation to my research project. This took place during our Sunday evening service (6:30 p.m.) on March 2, 2025. My primary goal was to explain the “what,” “why,” and “how” of the project to my audience. The nature of this interaction was more like that of an interactive class than a lecture. I facilitated our dialogue by employing a PowerPoint presentation which consisted of seven unique slides.<sup>66</sup> There were over 35 individuals gathered on that evening. Additionally, the majority of our elders, deacons, and teachers were present. Upon concluding this presentation, I explained that I needed at least five volunteers for the next phase. I secured over twice that amount.

In phase two I interviewed twelve members of the congregation. My goal was twofold. First, I wanted to discover questions that, up to that point, my investigation had failed to address. Second, I wanted to understand any barriers to peace, and sources of

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<sup>66</sup> This is located in Appendix E.

conflict, that members of the Uniontown church of Christ have encountered, while navigating earthly inheritance issues, so that I could more effectively minister to them. Although there was an element of quantitative research present, the thrust of this research was qualitative. As such, I developed an interview which primarily consisted of open-ended questions.<sup>67</sup> This is what I discovered.

Ten out of twelve (~83%) interviewees had received an earthly inheritance. Five of them received it from their mothers, four from their fathers, and one from a friend. Most characterized their relationship with the one who left them an inheritance as “good,” “very good,” or “excellent.” One mentioned having had a strained relationship with their father earlier in life. Another confessed to “not having much of a relationship” with their father.

One person did not split the inheritance. Two split it with one other person. Three split it with two others. One split it with three others. Three split it with five others. In these instances, siblings (or siblings-in-law) were always in view and, in almost every case, the relationships these individuals had with their co-inheritors remained the same both before and after the inheritance was apportioned. One mentioned a minor strain that arose with a sibling-in-law. Two others mentioned a “strained relationship” with a younger sibling that persisted. And, another, related how an “o.k. relationship” with a younger sibling devolved into “no relationship” at all.

Respectively, in these last four cases, the interviewees attributed the conflict to: 1. The sibling-in-law’s “preconceived ideas” and greed. 2. The “baby of the family” being

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<sup>67</sup> This is located in Appendix D. The informed consent form is located in Appendix C.

“spoiled and always thinking that they deserved everything.” 3. The younger sibling thought that they should get everything because they were always a “selfish hammerhead.” 4. And, the younger sibling was uninvolved in caring for their parent and was a completely “worldly” person.

In contrast to the four, the five who split an inheritance with their siblings but did not experience any conflict, all attributed that outcome to the values instilled in them from their youth. They spoke of how money was never emphasized when they were growing up and/or of being “fair minded” and/or their parent’s explicit (or implicit) expectation for “all the siblings to get along” when dividing the inheritance.

When asked whether they were satisfied with the portion of the inheritance they received everyone answered, “Yes.” However, the reasons they supplied varied. One was convinced that what they received was “unfair” and, yet, they “let it go” because fighting over earthly treasure “is not worth it.” Another stated that “overall” they were satisfied because, although they received more than their siblings, they did more for their parent. Three others stated that it was “equal.” One of these also emphasized that it “fulfilled the wishes” of their deceased loved one. Another indicated the same and added that they looked upon what they received as a gift. Still another agreed with this sentiment. And, similarly, two more were thankful for the opportunities their reception of an earthly inheritance provided for them to settle their own debts and contribute to the needs of others.

All twelve interviewees were able to respond to the question, “When dealing with matters pertaining to an earthly inheritance, what biblical perspectives, principles, and/or practices would you commend to others...?” Here again, the answers differed but the

overarching sentiment did not. Prayer and “faith in God” were given a primary place. Additionally, everyone agreed that this world is not all there is and that, one day, we will have to give an account of the things that we have done “in the body whether good or evil.” Thus we should live differently. We should “honor our mother and father,” “love one another,” and “be grateful, honest, and fair.” Conversely, we should not “complain,” especially about our blessings, and we must not “lie, cheat, and/or steal” from others. The unjust will be condemned. Furthermore, we must be willing to share our material blessings with others. Indeed, we must even be willing to forego, or abandon, them if they stand between us and our Maker. After all, “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” and “you cannot serve both God and Money,” and “where your treasure is there your heart will be also” and “for what does it profit a person if they gain the whole world and yet lose their soul?” Although I could continue to cite the multitudinous biblical references and allusions my interviewees and I discussed over the course of the interview, these will suffice for, over the course of this composition, I have already spoken of the passages we deemed most pertinent.

As above, all twelve interviewees were able to respond to the final two questions, “What extra-biblical advice would you commend...” and, the obligatory, “Are there any other thoughts you have related to this topic?” Again, the answers varied. However three categories emerged, preparation, communication, and perspective. Regarding preparation, seven recommended “planning ahead.” These suggested that one, “find a trustworthy attorney (x2) and an accountant (x1),” “have a will (x2),” “set up a trust (x1),” “have only a single executor (x1)” and “consider distributing an inheritance to loved ones before passing from this life (x2).” Next, regarding communication, four urged everyone to be

“open” by “communicating clearly” and frequently with all parties involved in the bestowal, or distribution of, an inheritance. People generally do not like surprise and by being transparent one can avoid much grief. Finally, regarding perspective, three wanted to remind others that whatever one receives as an inheritance is, in fact, “a gift.” Referring to the deceased, one of these added that the inheritance, “is theirs to apportion and ours to distribute per their wishes” and that “when we do what we have been instructed to do, and we behave in a thankful and honest manner, then we will be at peace.”

In phase three I preached a sermon to my congregation. This message, coupled with its accompanying slide presentation, is the biblical, theological, and pastoral resource I have developed. The sermon manuscript and slides are located in Appendix F.

In phase four I surveyed 20 members of the Uniontown church of Christ. The “Post-Sermon Survey” I designed is located in Appendix G. It consists of eight statements and two questions. The statements employ a Likert Scale.<sup>68</sup> One of the questions is a closed question and the other is an open-ended question. These completed surveys were anonymously submitted. I now relate their results including the derived numerical consensus of the responses.

## **Project Results**

Regarding the statement: “I believe that this is an important topic to address in a sermon” there was general agreement (average score = 4.25). Personally, I expected that

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<sup>68</sup> It is scaled thus: 1 = Strongly Disagree / 2 = Disagree / 3 = Neutral / 4 = Agree / 5 = Strongly Agree

everyone would either agree (4) or strongly agree (5) with this assertion. I was surprised that two members indicated a neutral (3) opinion. How could anyone not think that this is worthy of consideration? I sincerely wonder.

The next statement reads: “The passages of Scripture referenced within the sermon were adequate and relevant.” Here, I anticipated that most would strongly agree, and they did (4.6). No one expressed a neutral (3) opinion. The emphasis within the sermon upon biblical passages that speak explicitly about inheritance surely helped.

The third statement reads: “The interpretation of the Biblical text was reasonable.” I hoped that most would strongly agree with this, and they did (4.65). Perhaps this had to do with me keeping my own commentary to a minimum. That said, there was one neutral (3) opinion expressed on this point. I wonder what passage, or passages, the individual thought was extraneous or misunderstood.

The fourth and fifth statements read: “Any illustrations/examples provided were engaging and helpful” and “The application made within the message was practical and related well to my life.” Here, I anticipated receiving the lowest scores, and I did (along with the first statement). The former assertion received a 4.3 (with one neutral (3)) and the latter received a 4.25 (with two neutrals (3)). I anticipated low scores because, compared to many other messages that I have preached to my congregation over the past decade, this message had very few illustrations and examples. Additionally, in my opinion, it contained too much “surface level” application.

The sixth statement reads: “The sermon was well presented.” This was strongly agreed upon (4.75). There were no neutrals (3). In addition to my own preparation and

experience preaching, the PowerPoint I used surely helped. Furthermore, I believe that my congregation's interest and, perhaps, their partiality toward their preacher contributed to this, the highest of my scores.

The seventh statement reads: "The length of the sermon was appropriate." It took me approximately 40 minutes to preach this message. Since my congregation is accustomed to 25–30-minute sermons I anticipated receiving a score lower than the 4.45 I received (there was one neutral (3)). Perhaps this had to do with the interesting subject matter? This brings us to the final assertion.

The eighth statement reads: "I would recommend this sermon to others." This was strongly agreed upon (4.6) as I thought it would be. There were no neutrals (3). This question leads us to the closed question.

"Prior to this sermon, had you ever heard a sermon regarding earthly inheritances?" One person said, "Yes." Nine said, "I do not recall." Ten said, "No." For me, these responses validated my research project inquiry. 50% of those surveyed are confident that they have never heard a sermon on the topic of earthly inheritances and 45% percent may have heard one, but, if they have, it was not memorable.

The tenth, and final, question was, "Do you have any other thoughts on today's topic?" Here are the responses: "The topic may not be as relevant today because I'm not going through the process of receiving and inheritance, but it is useful for when/if that occurs." Another said, this is, "A needed lesson." A third said, "The topic was great to hear. I needed to hear it." A fourth said, "I have not experienced this yet. But it will likely

benefit me in the future.” Finally, a fifth said, “ Jesus came to earth to obey His Father; He also had an inheritance.”

### **Summary**

My goal was to effectively communicate a biblical perspective regarding earthly inheritances to my congregation. Based upon both formal (i.e., the surveys) and informal feedback (i.e., subsequent discussions) I believe that I accomplished my goal. However, I also believe that there is room for improvement. Indeed, at some point, based upon my own criticisms and the criticisms of others, I plan to refine and re-preach this message .

In Chapter 4 I will reflect upon what I have discovered and how I, and my ministry, may mature to better meet the needs of my congregation.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

For nearly 2,000 years followers of Christ have had much to say about Money and Possessions. The acquisition, proper use, and the abuse of wealth has been a continual topic for both clergypersons and lay theologians alike. Although many from around the world have expounded upon the subject to a lesser or greater extent, it is interesting to note that a remarkable amount of agreement has been maintained concerning it. Religious traditions and denominational opinions vary in many areas within Christendom, but not so much when it comes to their opinions of “Mammon” or “filthy lucre.” I believe that there are, at least, three reasons for this.

First, whether an individual is Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant and/or Nondenominational there has been (nearly) universal agreement over which books constitute the New Testament canon ever since, at least, the fourth century.<sup>69</sup> From Matthew to Revelation, it consists of the same 27 books.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, regardless of the precise number of books of which it is comprised,<sup>71</sup> the Old Testament has also been considered to be equally inspired. Common source material leads to shared conclusions.

This brings us to the second reason I believe that a consensus view of wealth has emerged within Christendom. Historically, the way in which Christians have read, and

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<sup>69</sup> Early Church Texts. "Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter." Accessed March 21, 2025. [https://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/athanasius\\_39th\\_festal\\_letter.htm](https://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/athanasius_39th_festal_letter.htm).

<sup>70</sup> 2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

<sup>71</sup> Protestants and/or Nondenominational – 39 / Roman Catholic – 46 / Eastern Orthodox – 49 / Oriental Orthodox 46-54

interpreted, the Scriptures related to this topic has been both holistic and nuanced. Again I cite Witherington, who also cites Wheeler:

We live in an atomistic age, the age of the sound bite, the quick glimpse, the short summary. The constant cry as we sail a sea of information in the information age is “boil it down,” which usually means, at least implicitly, dumb it down or simplify it. It is not surprising, then, that when it comes to a subject as complex as money and wealth distorted approaches to the data are all too common. The temptation is to cherry-pick this or that verse, this or that passage, to justify a preconceived theology of possessions and wealth. There are ways to avoid such selective misuse of the biblical texts. One, of course, is to look at as much of the text as one can, and resist the temptation to ignore the bits that seem inconvenient for one’s favorite theory. In an important study, Sondra Wheeler points out how paying attention to the whole Bible - and not just a favored passage or two – can change the discussion about money. “For example,” writes Wheeler, “to an interpreter who finds Luke 12:33 (‘sell your possessions and give to the poor’) a moral rule requiring complete divestiture, binding on all believers in every time and place, the equally clear injunction ‘Do not neglect hospitality’ (Heb. 13:2) presents a problem. How can Christians invite strangers into their homes if they are not to own anything?” Such a canonical or whole-Bible approach requires that we understand the social as well as the literary context of the given injunctions. For example, when we look at Luke 12:33 (“sell your possessions and give to the poor”) in the larger context of just Luke’s Gospel alone, it is clear that neither Jesus nor Luke intended such an injunction to be universally applied to all persons in all circumstances. But there is no way to know this without careful examination of the larger context, which is precisely what is often missing in today’s church discussions about what the Bible says about money.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, I believe that a consensus view of wealth has emerged, and been maintained, within Christendom because of our common faith. We believe that there is more to life than just this life. We believe that what we think, and say, and do, really does matter. And, we believe, that we ought to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27).

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<sup>72</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus and Money*, 12-13.

My research topic (i.e., earthly inheritances) is a subcategory of Money and Possessions. Thus, in keeping with its biblical, theological, and pastoral aim, over the course of it I have sought to bring clarity to the following broad questions. First, what does the Bible teach about earthly inheritances? Second, what is the meaning of these teachings in their original context? And, third, how do these teachings apply to us today?

Admittedly, it is this final question that has proven to be the most difficult because there are an endless number of special scenarios and/or doleful dilemmas that one can posit when it comes to matters pertaining to earthly inheritances. These inevitably lead to another question, “What constitutes wise stewardship of an inheritance?” Although I cannot address every possible situation, I am convinced that it is important for us to keep the following three considerations in mind.

First, differing worldviews can lead to dramatically different decisions. For example, let us imagine that there are two different individuals who enter into a dispute over an earthly inheritance. The first is a Christian. The second is not. The first subscribes to the seven suggestions I previously set forth. The second does not. Is it not reasonable to assume that those who see things differently will behave differently? Of course it is. I am reminded of the Apostle Paul’s words to the Corinthians, “If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (1 Cor 15:32b).”

Second, having a Christian worldview does not preclude disagreements over earthly inheritances. Two different Christians can believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. They can believe that it provides guidance when it comes to earthly inheritances. And they can still disagree about its precise application in any given circumstance. The Bible is a written document. It requires interpretation and, for reasons

beyond the scope of this project, not everyone interprets well. That said, it is clear that some governing hermeneutic is required for whenever one must choose between two conflicting paths. I am convinced that one should prioritize life over liberty and liberty over the pursuit of happiness. After all, this was a Christian proclamation long before it was an American declaration (Matt 12:9-11; Luke 13:10-17; 1 Cor 8).

Third, even if two individuals have the same Christian worldview and interpret Scripture in the same way, it does not necessarily mean that they will avoid conflict over an earthly inheritance. Yes, wise stewardship is possible, and I certainly believe there is a “Christian ideal” applicable to any inheritance-related scenario one can envision. While some may consider this view to be naïve, I do not. The existence of an ideal does not assure us that people will practice it. What is truly naïve, and unbiblical I might add, is to claim that, because some individuals fail to practice the ideal, the ideal itself does not exist (John 12:48; Heb 4:12-13).

This undertaking has been both challenging and rewarding. I now turn my attention to what I have discovered regarding my topic, my congregation, and myself.

### **Project Findings**

The goal of this doctoral research project was to create a biblical, theological, and pastoral resource/sermon that would assist members of the Uniontown church of Christ as they navigate issues related to the giving, or receiving, of an earthly inheritance. Having accomplished this goal, there are certain findings that I want to emphasize.

First, my topic is important inasmuch as it is one that is common to all mankind. Generally speaking, people own things. They acquire money and possessions over the

course of their lives. Then, they die and, since they “can’t take it with them,” it passes to others. The Lord’s question is always relevant, “This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be (Luke 12:20b)?”

Some individuals and families fight over earthly inheritances (Luke 12:13-15). But not all of them do. Although I have touched upon some of the underlying reasons for this, the truth is, I have only scratched the surface. It is clear that one’s worldview plays a significant role in these matters. But, what is not clear, and perhaps never will be, is the point at which an individual is willing to compromise their values. Sin is very real and, no doubt, many have abandoned their heavenly inheritance for the sake of earthly gain. Yet, despite this ever-present danger, the Church has provided very little spiritual guidance regarding matters pertaining to earthly inheritances. To some extent this deficiency prompted my modest offering.

The Bible is full of pertinent information on the topic of earthly inheritances, and we have repeatedly seen this on our journey “from Adam to the Apostles.” But the road we have trod has been neither short nor easy. Perhaps this is a reason why, spiritually speaking, it is the road less traveled.

Second, I must say that my congregation, to borrow the words of Robert Frost, “has made all the difference.” As it relates to this project, my congregation’s influence began over 11 years ago when one of our members, and her sister, decided to give their parent’s home to the church. That home is now the parsonage in which my family and I reside. It is located less than 1,000 feet from our place of worship, and it is where I now pen these words. But, this is not the only blessing I have received from my brothers and sisters.

Along the way the Uniontown church of Christ has been a constant source of encouragement. Since 2021 I have told nearly every adult member of the congregation about my research project topic. Although some have been more interested than others, everyone has agreed that this is an important topic. Unsurprisingly, those with the keenest interest are those who have experienced, or are experiencing, earthly inheritance-related matters. Several have asked me, “When are you going to get around to preaching a sermon on that topic?” I have now done so.

Additionally, I am now able to provide them with a copy of that sermon; one which was not developed in isolation. Throughout this project, I have engaged with my congregation in a variety of ways. It began with conversations. Later, I presented a “project overview” to many of them wherein I shared the work I had already completed and solicited their ideas and advice. I then secured a dozen interviewees who, through our dialogue, helped me to craft my resource (i.e., the sermon and slides). Finally, following the proclamation of that message, both formal (through a survey) and informal feedback was provided by my congregation. This has allowed me to reflect upon my work and consider various ways in which it may be refined for future presentations. Perhaps I shall even turn it into a small book for, presently, it is all the more clear that the difficult topics of wealth and inheritance cannot be adequately addressed in simple formulas and “quick fixes.” Instead, they must be addressed through systematic investigation and proclamation coupled with ongoing prayer and dialogue. May God grant us grace as we strive to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16b).

Third, regarding myself, I have also made some discoveries. I have learned patience, for an undertaking of this magnitude is impossible to accomplish in a short

time. I have learned humility, because I was told that my initial proposal was riddled with too many problems to be worthwhile and that it needed to be changed, and so I did. And, I have learned that, despite the “go big or go home” attitude of so many there is nothing wrong with starting small. I now have a research project that can be expanded in many useful ways.

Finally, within the religious group of which I am a member, we typically do things according to the “New Testament pattern.” We strive to “call Bible things by Bible names and we do Bible things in Bible ways.”<sup>73</sup> We emphasize the “commands, (approved) examples, and necessary inferences” of New Testament texts and, by following these, we are assured that we are following God’s will. Yet, when it comes to some questions, such as, “How should one navigate matters associated with an earthly inheritance” we are harder pressed to discern His will. Over the course of this doctoral research project, one of the main things that I have learned is that it is highly beneficial to interpret God’s word in conjunction with members of my own religious community; even while I dialogue with those outside of my community. In the highest sense, Truth only has one source, and it is always important to be receptive of it, or rather, Him.

### **Conclusion**

It has been a blessing to be a member of the Uniontown church of Christ for nearly eleven years. Lord willing, I shall be a part of it for many more years to come. Through this research project I was able to develop a resource that would assist members

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<sup>73</sup> For example, this is why our bishops are always married men (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

of my congregation in navigating earthly inheritance issues. And, upon presenting that message, I was immediately reassured of the value of my work.

In fact, one member, who has only spoken to me about one other sermon in the eleven years I have known her, approached me following my message. She was highly complimentary but, unlike others, she did not proceed to tell me about her own inheritance-related issues. Instead, she spoke of her professional experience “working at the courthouse” and just how desperately she thought so many families within our own community need to hear this message. I agreed, but despite all the work I have done I am convinced that I could never improve upon the Lord’s words, and so it is with them that I now close:

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:13-21).

## Appendix A

### The Poor Economy and the Economy of the Poor (Scripture Readings – Galatians 2:9-10; 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:6-12)

#### Introduction

##### A. Greetings...

1. A famous author once said,
  - a. “We must hate the world enough to want to change it, but love the world enough to think it worth changing.” – *G.K. Chesterton*
2. And, yet, more importantly it is written in,
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:15-17 **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**

i. Doing God’s will...that is what it is all about. [...]

And yet there are some areas that are often neglected.

And, worse still, there are some people that are often neglected...and one such group...is the poor.

ii. *Go ahead and turn with me to Luke 16.*

B. Moreso than any other New Testament author, Dr. Luke (*Colossians 4.14*) the *Gentile*, emphasizes the plight of the poor...and the responsibility of the rich.

1. For example, Luke 16 begins with,
  - a. The Parable of the Dishonest Manager.
    - i. Therein Jesus urges us saying in verse 9,

**“Luke 16:9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”** (*BTW, contextually, He is*

*talking about using your earthly money to help the poor.)*

2. Next, Christ, takes aim at materialism...and in verse 13 He speaks these famous words,

a. **"Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."**

However, that just hits too close to home for the Pharisees...look at the next verse...

b. **Luke 16:14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.**

But Jesus did not miss a beat...

c. **Luke 16:15 And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. [...]"**

3. Now, Jesus goes on to provide another powerful lesson.

a. And through the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus...we discern that the Rich Man is lost because of his abuse of stewardship.

i. He neglected a poor beggar in this life...and it is he who became a poor beggar in the next.

b. Indeed, his life...and afterlife...can be illustrated with the words of,

i. **Proverbs 21:13 Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. [...]**

And the Rich Man's life...and afterlife... are starkly contrasted by the words of,

ii. **Psalms 41:1b Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; [...]**

C. So, how can we avoid the Rich Man's fate?

1. And what should our attitude be toward our possessions?

- a. Who are the poor...and what are some misconceptions concerning them?
- b. Finally, what should prompt us, *or what should provoke us*, to provide for the poor?

[First...Let's consider our...]

## I. Means

A. The Bible tells us in,

1. James 1:16-17 **Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. (17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**

a. And indeed that is so.

B. Take inventory for a moment. Think about one way in which God has blessed you over the past week. [...]

1. Now think of another...and another...and another...[...]

a. I think you see what I am getting at.

i. One of the reasons why there are so many miserable people in the world...is because most do not do what we just did.

b. Instead they whine...they gripe...they complain.

i. Just as we heard about during Wednesday night's devotional. [...]

c. You see...miserable people are good at numbering their problems.

i. They are not good at counting their blessings. [...]

3. And one of the areas miserable people often harp upon...is money...so, let's go there. [...]

C. Money...some Christians have a little...others have a lot.

1. And that is nothing new.

a. That has always been the case in the body of Christ. [...]

2. Now, while all of us should give ourselves entirely to the Lord's work...always putting first things first.

a. What I want us to notice is this...the rich are given a special charge in Holy Scripture. Look at the words of,

**1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:17-19 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (18) They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (19) thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.**

Notice that Paul wanted Timothy to tell wealthy Christians several things...Don't be puffed up...Don't think your money is going to save you...trust in God and do good works...in particular be generous and be ready to share your wealth...and in so doing you will take hold of eternal life...

2. **"Ready to share"** I know that those words rub some folks the wrong way...but they are in the Bible for a reason.

a. And...as I have said many times before...if you don't like what God is telling you in His word.

i. He is not the One with the problem. – *You are.*

D. In Luke 12:15-21 Jesus warns us in the Parable of the Rich Fool,

**1. Luke 12:15-21 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (16) And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' (18) And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' (20) But God**

said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (21) **So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."**

a. But, are we rich toward God? [...]

i. Are we laying up treasure for ourselves here on this earth...or are we laying up treasure in Heaven? [...]

2. Some might ask, "How? How can I lay up treasure in Heaven?"

a. If they are earthly minded...they may even say, "I can't reach it."

i. But the truth is it is not beyond our reach.

b. And God's word has an answer...But are we willing to accept it? [...]

i. You see, just a few verses later Jesus says in,

**Luke 12:33-34 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. (34) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. [...]**

ii. You may object and say, "Well that's too hard!"

iii. But you are not the first to say that...and I doubt you will be the last.

E. In fact, we can read of a rich young ruler who took the same approach. After his interaction with Jesus it is written in,

**1. Mark 10:22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**

a. You say, "Well not everyone can give up all they have and follow Jesus."

i. And based upon Scripture, and experience, I would say that you are right.

F. You see...I know that parents are obligated to save up for their children.

1. 2 Corinthians 12:14b **For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.**

G. Furthermore, I know that we are to provide for our relatives,

1. 1 Timothy 5:8 **But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. [...]**

H. But I also know that a complete view of the New Testament leads us to conclude that some gave up everything to follow the Lord...and others did not...and they still followed the Lord, look at,

1. Mark 10:28-30 **Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." (29) Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, (30) who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.**

a. When we are born again...when we enter the Christian family...we gain many new relatives.

i. But...here is the question...how does one gain houses in this life...if all who are Christians dispossess themselves of their houses? [...]

b. The truth is that God does not call upon everyone to sell their homes to serve Him, for example, by doing mission work in another country.

i. But He does call some to do that.

c. And, especially for those of us who are here today...those of us who do have homes.

i. We need to ask ourselves this, "Is my home (*or rather, the home with which the Lord has blessed me*) at His service." [...]

How hospitable are we?

How willing are we to share not just our homes, but our possessions with others? [...]

I. You see the Christian attitude towards things is this...they are just things.

1. It is not so much WHAT you have...rather, it is about...

a. How you got it...and what you are doing with it?

[Now we come to...]

## II. Misconceptions

A. When I was 9 years old a certain song...by a certain artist...came out that some of you may recognize.

1. Its words are relevant...and though I will not sing them...here are the opening lyrics,

She calls out to the man on the street  
Sir, can you help me?  
It's cold and I've nowhere to sleep  
Is there somewhere you can tell me?

He walks on, doesn't look back  
He pretends he can't hear her  
Starts to whistle as he crosses the street  
Seems embarrassed to be there

Oh, think twice, 'cause it's another day for you and me in paradise  
Oh, think twice, 'cause it's another day for you, you and me in paradise

Think about it [...]

B. When you look upon a poor person...what is it that you think? - Do you think that they are lazy? Do you think that they are a blight upon society? Worse? - What I want us to consider is this...there are many reasons why people are poor. For example,

1. Sinful actions on the part of another is one of them.

a. Injustice - Proverbs 13:23 reads, **The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.**

i. In other words, the immoral, unethical actions of others can lead some to poverty (*emphasized in the Prophets*).

ii. The strong often prey upon the weak. - The rich often exploit the poor.

iii. And...through no fault of their own...some become impoverished. [...]

2. However, a complete view recognizes that one's own choices can also lead to poverty.

a. A person's own sin(s) can lead them into poverty.

b. Proverbs 23:20-21 **Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, (21) for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.**

i. We have all seen it...people stumbling down the street drinking liquor from a bottle in a paper bag...

The abuse of alcohol and other drugs has led many to poverty.

ii. And there are other addictive behaviors...such as gambling...which have done the same.

iii. Some choose to hang out with the wrong crowd...they drop out of school...or make other foolish choices.

iv. And though their excuses are as many as their transgressions...in the end they are simply that...excuses. [...]

3. A there is another reason which is commonplace...laziness,

a. Proverbs 10:4 **A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.**

b. Proverbs 19:15 **Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.**

i. The Bible does say in,

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 **For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. (11) For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. (12) Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.**

ii. But, here is the thing to keep in mind...it is far too simplistic, and just wrong, to assume that all poor people are lazy.

And that if they would just get a job...and work hard...everything would be right for them. [...]

Have you ever been unemployed?

Have you ever been underemployed? [...]

C. Now through the years, one of the biggest problems I have seen is this...some people...or rather...some Christians...have a way of mixing up charity and justice. (*Romans 4:4*)

1. One author captured this well when he said,

a. "It is true that there is a thing crudely called charity, which means charity to the deserving poor; but charity to the deserving is not charity at all, but justice. It is the undeserving who require it, and the ideal either does not exist at all, or exists wholly for them...."

2. Recall Jesus' words in,

a. Mark 14:7a **For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. [...]**

i. But how often do we do so?

[And what is our...]

### III. Motive

A. Quickly, I want to share with you 4 reasons why we should help the poor.

B. #1 - We should help the poor to avoid punishment...

1. Matthew 25:40-46 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) **For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'** (44) Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' (45) Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' (46) And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

C. #2 - We should help the poor to be rewarded...

1. Matthew 6:2-4 **"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

D. #3 - We should help the poor to make friends...

1. Luke 16:9 **And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.**

E. #4 - We should help the poor to be like Christ...

1. 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 **We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (3) For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- (5) and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (6) Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. (7) But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in this act of grace also. (8) I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. (9) For you know**

**the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.**

## **Conclusion**

A. At about this time in the sermon, if not before, I'm sure all the inward *if not outward* objections begin to arise. Some of you might be thining...

1. "But some of them don't deserve it..."

Have you read anything...in any of the Scriptures...that talks about helping the "deserving poor?"

2. "But I don't have money to spare..."

Regardless of how much, or how little, we have...God wants us to share.

Which means we may have to cutback in order to do that.

3. "But I want to be a good steward..."

That is fine...but being a "good steward" means helping those who are in need.

And if we are using our suspicions as an excuse to not help the poor...well then... we should go and reread the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

I wonder if the Rich Man thought,

"Well I can't give Lazarus any money...because he might go buy beer!"

*OR*

*"I can't give him any food or drink...because with the money he saves from not having to buy his own...he's going to go buy beer!"*

4. Of course, another thing people say is this...

"But the problem is too big...what can one person do?"

Well, you may not be able to change the world.

But by God's grace you can change yourself...by helping someone else. *Please turn to Acts 20.*

B. *Many years ago, I read a story about a man who frequented a convenience store.*

- 1. One day, he noticed the convenience store owner had tears in his eyes...So he asked him what was the matter?*
- 2. The Owner said, "Do you see that bench over there? There's an older woman who sits on it everyday knitting. Buses come and go, but she never gets on and no one ever gets off to meet her. The other day I took her a cup of coffee and sat with her for a while. I discovered that her only son lives far away. She last saw him about two years ago when he boarded a bus right there.*
- 3. The son is married now and the mom has never met his wife nor seen their new child. She told me, 'It helps to come here and wait. I pray for them as I knit for the baby, and I think of their home, as we save money for a visit. I can't wait to see them.'"*
- 4. The store owner took a deep breath and told the man that just a few minutes ago he had looked out the window and there were the woman's son and his family getting off the bus. When they fell into her arms, the look on her face was the nearest thing to pure joy he had ever seen. He said, "I'll never forget the look on her face as long as I live."*
- 5. The customer paused, and then said, "You purchased the tickets didn't you."*
- 6. And with eyes full of love, the store owner replied, "Yes. Yes I did."*
- 7. The customer later repeated the story to others saying, "I'll never forget the look on the store owner's face."*

C. I've seen my share of heavenly looks on the faces of recipients of acts of kindness.

1. But I have also seen, the looks upon the faces of those who give...let us close with,
  - a. **Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"**

i. May God grant us the grace to remember the poor.

D. Invitation...

## Appendix B

### A Simple Life (S.R. – Galatians 6:7-10)

#### Introduction

A. Greetings...*Hebrews 13*

B. The days grow shorter.

1. The temperature grows colder.

2. And then there's the rain...and the wind...and the snow.

a. Once again...winter is coming. 😞 [...]

C. There is always so much going on at this time of the year...and not just with reference to the weather.

1. Thanksgiving has passed...and Christmas is on the way...along with all its parties, programs, and activities.

a. We have our plans...and I am sure that you do as well. [...]

D. But, some of us have been...or will be...undergoing things for which we have not planned.

1. And maybe it has to do with our jobs...or our traveling plans...or our own health...or the health of someone we love. [...]

a. We look out at the world...and we hear others singing those beautiful words,

i. "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas."

b. But, in our hearts...things just do not feel the same.

i. And there is a simple reason for that...because things are not the same.

And if that does not sound comforting to you...know that it is not meant to *sound comforting*. [...]

2. In this changing world what is comforting is this...we serve Someone Who does not change,

a. Hebrews 13:8 **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

And He has come...and He has spoken to us saying in the words of...

b. John 16:33 **I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

Peace...True – Abiding - Peace...is found only in Christ.

The world brings us down...but He lifts us up...*or raises us up...*

To borrow words from a popular song,

I am strong when I am on your shoulders.  
You raise me up, to more than I can be. [...]

E. Today, amidst all the chaos and complexity of our lives during this Holiday Season...I want us to find comfort...and I want us to find reassurance by considering...*or considering once again...* what it means to live “A Simple Life.” [...]

F. Many people lead lives that are full...and yet they are unfulfilled.

1. From sunup ‘til sundown...and often even after that...they are overwhelmed with their many responsibilities.

a. They live in a state of constant worry.

i. They are worried about elected officials and the economy...

ii. They are worried about gasoline and groceries...

iii. They are worried about their finances and their relationships...

iv. They are worried about jobs and health...

b. And...unsurprisingly...the friendships they pursue...and the Media they devour...*from one News network to the next*...only adds to their despair. [...]

2. It makes them miserable...and mad...in both senses of the word...and although they know them to be true...the words of our Lord are pushed far from their minds...

a. Matthew 6:33-34 But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (34)** **"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**

3. What is perplexing...and troubling...is that, when presented with a choice, these same individuals usually end up choosing to do more...and to have more...and to consume more.

a. They wield “shovels of misery” as they dig their “own graves of dissatisfaction.” [...]

i. And if all that is not concrete enough for you...

Let me clarify by saying that those shovels...often take the form of credit cards...smart phones...and television remotes.

b. So many people become consumed with “stuff” – and - “the spirit of this age.” [...]

C. But what they need...is peace...what they long for is happiness...

1. But this morning, I tell you, peace and happiness eludes them (*it eludes us?*) because they (*because we?*) choose not to live, “A Simple Life.”

2. One author has said,

a. “Simplicity of life is not frugality; it is life unencumbered, a life free of things we own so that they do not own us.”

b. “...When we cultivate a sense of ‘enoughness,’ when we learn to enjoy things for their own sake, when we learn to be gentle even with what is lacking in ourselves, we find ourselves free to be where we are and to stop mourning where we are not.”

D. The Apostle Paul touched upon this when he wrote,

1. Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I am speaking of being in need, **for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. (12) I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

2. The good news for us is that the same One who strengthened Paul can strengthen us today.

a. And He can help us to live “a simple life.”

i. But, what, exactly, does that mean?

[I want to explore that with you as we take a moment to...]

## I. Reflect

A. Where are we...and where do we want to be?

1. How can we live simpler lives?

a. The truth is, in one sense, the answer will vary from one individual to the next.

i. We are not all at the same station of our lives. [...]

2. Many would like to get rid of all their possessions...

a. They would like to be relieved of all their obligations.

b. But we should realize that our actions, as well as our goals, need to be responsible. [...]

i. We should not feel guilty about providing for ourselves or our family.

For it is written in,

**1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

And in,

2 Thessalonians 3:10 *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.***

ii. Once again, we should not feel guilty about the work we are doing...but we need to realize that there may very well come a time...sometimes sooner...sometimes later...when our roles of service must change.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 21, King David, learned that lesson...and there will come a time in our lives when we will too. [...]

B. But, “Simplifying one’s life does not mean “throwing in the towel.”

1. It does not mean “kicking back and doing nothing.”

2. It means that we make it our aim to be good stewards of that with which we have been blessed.

a. And I’m not just talking about how we handle the THINGS in our lives...

b. I’m talking about how we treat the PEOPLE in our lives as well. [...]

3. In this regard...and following on the heels of what we just read...I am reminded of two other passages...listen closely...

a. In the second half of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:14 it is said,

i. 2 Corinthians 12:14b **For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.**

*(which reminds us of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:8)*

b. And yet in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:4, just 4 verses earlier, it is said,

i. 1 Timothy 5:4 **But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.** (*cf. Mark 7:11-13*)

4. There is no contradiction in these words...because there is no contradiction in love.

a. We have been so very blessed...but...will we be a blessing to others? [...]

[We need to reflect upon our lives...and when we do we need to...*Luke 12*...]

## II. Reevaluate

A. How much are we paying for the things we enjoy?

1. \$20 per month? \$200 per month? \$2,000...Perhaps more?

2. Now, another question...

a. How much are we paying for the things we no longer enjoy?

i. Do we have subscriptions that we no longer use?

ii. Do we have memberships that we have abandoned?

iii. Do we have anything in storage?

*I know it's a sore point for many...*

*(The garage, spare bedroom and basement are overflowing and so now you've had to bite the bullet and pay others to keep all of that "important stuff" for you?) ☺*

3. Years ago my dad purchased a high-tech boat...which he housed for a long time at a marina in Steinhatchee, FL.

a. At first, he was excited...he used it a lot and had some fun times...

i. But as time went by...he used it less and less...

And it cost him more and more. [...]

B. The American writer, Henry David Thoreau, once wrote,

1. "The cost of a thing is the amount of...life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run."

a. So now, let me ask again...

i. How much are we really paying for the things we enjoy?  
[...]

b. Are we willing to give up ourselves for them?

i. God's word tells us of a man who did,

C. Luke 12:16-21 And he told them a parable, saying, "**The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' (18) And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'** (20) But God said to him, '**Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.**"

1. Do you want to know how that parable started off?

a. Luke 12:13-15 **Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."** (14) But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (15) **And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."**

i. If only more people would take this to heart...

and

ii. If only more families would do so...when it comes to dividing up the possessions of their dearly departed.

I have seen it in my own family...and I have seen it in many others. [...]

D. We need to reevaluate our lives and we need to realize...*well, we need to realize what this illustration teaches...*

*1. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an American visited a renowned Polish Rabbi. The visitor saw that the Rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench.*

*"Rabbi," asked the visitor, "where is your furniture?"*

*As is characteristic of the Rabbinic teaching method the Rabbi replied with a question,*

*“Where is yours?”*

*“Mine?” asked the visitor, “But I’m only a visitor here. I’m only passing through.”*

*To which the Rabbi replied,*

*“So am I.”*

2. Yes, “This world is not my home; I’m just a passing thru...” ☺

[As we have reflected and reevaluated let us now seek...2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4...]

### III. Renewal

A. A famous martyr of the 20<sup>th</sup> century once said,

1. “To be simple is to fix one’s eye solely on the simple truth of God at a time when all concepts are being confused, distorted and turned upside down. It is to be single hearted.”

*(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)*

B. Life comes at us fast...

1. One moment we are setting off on what we believe will be our next big adventure...and the next moment we find ourselves...far from where we thought we would be.

a. Jobs change...Relationships fail...Accidents happen...Poor health is discovered...and the death of those whom we love takes place...

C. For those of us who are Christians...our challenge...through all the setbacks...through all the trials...through all the heartache...is to remain single hearted,

1. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 **So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (17) For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, (18) as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**

a. You see that is the Christian perspective...and if we believe that...if we really do...then, by God's grace, we can make it through whatever comes our way...as Paul goes on to say,

i. 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 **So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, (7) for we walk by faith, not by sight.**

D. This morning I have spoken about living "A Simple Life."

1. And if I have lost you somewhere along the way...I want you to pay attention for a moment because I'm going to...make it simple...

a. Simplifying your life...means letting go of one thing...because something else is more important.

i. It is about deciding what truly matters most to you...

ii. And seeking that with all your heart...your...soul...your strength...and your mind... 😊 (Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27) [...]

b. And, when you do that...you will find peace...you will find True Peace...and so, He, the Prince of Peace, says to us this day,

i. John 14:27 **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.**

[As we close...]

## Conclusion

A. What relationships...what attitudes...and what addictions...do we have that are not worth keeping?

1. That is a question that each one of us will answer...and perhaps sooner than we might think.

B. Let us take these words, the Lord's words, to heart,

1. Matthew 6:24-34 **"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (25) "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what**

you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (26) Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (27) And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? (28) And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, (29) yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (30) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (31) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (34) "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

B. True simplicity can be found by leading the life Jesus asked of His followers.

1. And maybe you would like to start living that life today...OR...Maybe you would like to recommit to that life once again.

C. The choice is set before you...won't you choose to live a simple life?

D. *Invitation...*

## Appendix C

### Ethnographic Interview Informed Consent

**Introduction:** My name is Carl Desmartin. I am a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary conducting research for the Doctor of Ministry degree. My telephone number is 724-557-7337. My professor is Dr. Jerome Creach and his phone number is 412-924-1428. You may contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to prepare, refine, present, and evaluate a Biblically based resource for the Uniontown church of Christ that will assist its members as they navigate matters associated with earthly inheritances.

**Procedure:** If you consent, you will be asked several questions related to the topic of earthly inheritances. I will take written notes during the interview.

**Time required:** The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

**Risks:** In any human subject research involving self-disclosure, there is always the possibility that you may feel discomfort or distress in the course of the research. If this happens, please inform me immediately. Additionally, since we will be discussing sensitive matters (e.g., death of loved ones and/or family conflict) I would like to make you aware that pastoral support/follow-up is being freely provided by Eugene Smith, Bob Coldren, and Dan Barnhart.

**Benefits:** While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to these questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. This study is intended to benefit the congregation by addressing an important, though neglected, topic.

**Confidentiality/Anonymity:** Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only interviewer and the only person who examines the written notes. When I write about the interview within my research project I will use pseudonyms—made up names—for all participants, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name.

**Sharing the results:** I plan to construct an ethnography—a written account of what I learn—based on these interviews together with my reading and historical research. This ethnography will be submitted to my professor no later than April 2025.

**Publication:** There is the possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use the pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

**Before you sign:**

By signing below, you are agreeing to an interview for this research study. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Individual Interview**

**Name & Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time & Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:**

1. Have you ever received an earthly inheritance?
  - a. Tell me about the relationship you had with the one who left you an inheritance.
  
2. How many others received a portion of this inheritance?
  - a. Tell me about your relationship with them both before and after the inheritance was divided.
  
3. Was there any conflict over this inheritance?
  - a. Tell me why you believe this occurred OR why you believe it did not occur.
  
4. Are you satisfied with the portion of the inheritance you received?
  - a. Tell me why you are OR why you are not.
  
5. When dealing with matters pertaining to an earthly inheritance, what biblical perspectives, principles, and/or practices would you commend to others and, especially, members of the Uniontown church of Christ?
  
6. What extra-biblical advice would you commend to them?
  
7. Are there any other thoughts you have related to this topic?

## Appendix E



### FROM ADAM TO THE APOSTLES:

A THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF EARTHLY  
INHERITANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY  
CHURCH MEMBERS OF THE UNIONTOWN CHURCH OF CHRIST

## INTRODUCTION



What am I  
doing?



Why am I  
doing it?



How am I  
doing it?



What do I need  
from you?

## CHAPTER 1

### MINISTRY SETTING



### IMPETUS FOR THE STUDY



## CHAPTER 2

- Biblical Investigation
  - A Semantic Analysis
  - A Perspective on Earthly Wealth
  - Earthly Inheritances
  - Practical Application
  - Exegetical Excursus



## CHAPTER 3

- Project Overview
  - Interview
  - Sermon/Presentation
  - Survey
- Project Results



## CHAPTER 4

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- Project Findings/Reflection
- Conclusion



## FROM ADAM TO THE APOSTLES:

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A THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF EARTHLY  
INHERITANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY  
CHURCH MEMBERS OF THE UNIONTOWN CHURCH OF CHRIST

## Appendix F

### Earthly Inheritance: A Biblical Perspective (S.R. – Matthew 16:24-28)

#### Introduction

A. Greetings...

B. Some time ago I came across an article that touched upon the topic of earthly inheritances it read,

1. The death of a parent is a difficult test for sibling relationships. Not only does it create a great deal of emotional tumult on an individual level, it can also stir up feelings of tension and suspicion...Old grievances can suddenly seem fresh...and...Differing perceptions of what each sibling has “earned” can create very different expectations.

A common scenario is when one child has done the lion’s share of the work taking care of an aging parent and assumes that he or she will receive the corresponding share of the inheritance. Or perhaps one child received financial support...while the parent was still alive, and the other siblings feel that should be factored into how...the inheritance is divided.

*The article continues...*

Economic disparity...can also create conflicts...An individual who is...financially stable, for instance, might prefer to hold onto a particular asset...while a sibling who has a greater financial need may want...a more immediate return.

Other common issues have to do with how new spouses or step-siblings figure into the picture, how dependent siblings (with physical or mental illness) are cared for, the estrangement of certain children from the parent, and the ugly possibility that one sibling...may have exerted undue influence for personal gain. All these situations, and too many others to name, pit siblings against each other as they try to sort out who gets what. [...]

2. That is what the article said...but such is not always the case.

a. Because, as we know, there are some families who get along just fine when it comes to divvying up the possessions of the dearly departed.

i. But what has been our own experience...and/or...what do we anticipate it to be? [...]

3. Of course, there are ways to prevent, *or at least, to mitigate*, family squabbles.

a. For example, those who are bestowing an inheritance are often encouraged, to “have a will,” – to “set up a trust,” – and/or “to consider distributing the inheritance to others before they pass.”

i. Many are advised to “find a good accountant...and a good attorney.”

ii. And, because of the way of the world, many who are to receive an inheritance are told to do the same. [...]

b. We are urged to “communicate clearly and frequently” with all parties who will be involved” because, by “being transparent we can avoid much grief.”

i. And while that seems reasonable...we know that it is not always true.

Why?

Because people vary, greatly...their expectations...their values...their world views...constantly collide with others’. [...]

C. This morning, I have no great financial, or legal, advice to offer regarding the subject of earthly inheritances.

1. Instead, I want to address this oft neglected topic by taking us on a journey through God’s word. [...]

a. First, we are going to consider Inheritance in the Old Testament

b. Second, we are going to consider Inheritance in the New Testament

and

c. Finally, we are going to consider How should we, as Christians, look upon an earthly inheritance?

D. Let us begin...in the beginning...please turn to Genesis 1...

## **I. Inheritance in the Old Testament**

A. In the beginning God created everything...and all things were good.

1. The first man, Adam, and his wife, the first woman, Eve, dwelt together in Eden.

a. There, in a garden the LORD had planted, they were told, **“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”** (*Gen. 2:16-17*).

i. It was the one thing expressly forbidden.

2. But our parents were disobedient.

a. They took hold of the tree’s fruit...they ate (*Genesis 3*).

3. Regarding this event, the Apostle Paul said,

a. Romans 5:12 **Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—**

i. Indeed, death passed to all but that was not all the only thing that was handed down.

ii. For, with the passing of our parents from this life...so, too...came the passing of their possessions to those who would continue in this life. [...]

B. Go to Genesis 30...in the second half of this chapter we can read of the Patriarch Jacob’s prosperity.

1. And, in the first verse of the very next chapter, we can read of a family dispute. It says,

a. Genesis 31:1-4 **Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban (*i.e., his brother-in-laws*) were saying, “Jacob has taken all that was our father’s, and from what was our father’s he has gained all this wealth.” (2) And Jacob saw that Laban (*i.e., his father-in-law*) did not regard him with favor as before. (3) Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.” (4) So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was...**

Jacob then explains what has transpired...and in vv. 14-16 we read,

b. Genesis 31:14-16 **Then Rachel and Leah (*his wives*) answered and said to him, “Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? (15) Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. (16) All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.”**

i. This is the first time an earthly inheritance is spoken of in Scripture...and, as we can see...there were problems. [...]

C. Of course, within the pages of the Old Testament, the majority of passages that refer to an inheritance, refer specifically, to the land of Canaan. *Turn to Deuteronomy 9*).

1. That physical Promised Land has been, and will continue to be, a source of controversy. – But, what is not controversial is that it was a gift. – Recall Moses’ “peptalk” to the Israelites just prior to their taking possession of that present:

a. Deuteronomy 9:1-6 **“Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you...*skipping to v. 3*...Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you. (4) “Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. (5) Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (6) “Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.**

i. At the right time, God used Israel as an instrument of destruction to punish the wicked inhabitants of Canaan (*cf. Gen. 15:13-16*).

ii. Additionally, God repeatedly emphasizes that Israel's reception of the Land has nothing to do with their own goodness...and everything to do with His goodness...in other words...God owed them nothing.

iii. Canaan was a gift, and for it, the LORD's people were to be grateful.

iv. In fact, earlier in this same discourse they had been warned in,

**b. Deuteronomy 8:7-18 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land...*skipping to v. 11*...“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ...v. 17...Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ (18) You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.**

i. What is the point?

The point is, the Israelites had quite literally, fought and died to conquer the Promised Land.

Yet, here, God Almighty emphasizes that it is He Who made their acquisition possible. [...]

2. God is the rightful owner of all things (*Psalms 24:1*)...and that includes the earthly Promised Land.

a. In fact, Leviticus 25:23 and Jeremiah 2:7 indicate that the Land was still His even after He gave it to His people. [...]

b. Indeed, it is a great blessing to be a steward of God's gifts.

i. But with that great blessing comes great responsibility. - (*This will become clearer in the New Testament.*)

D. Now, in the Old Testament there are numerous laws associated with the “legal transmission of property upon death”...and, if we had the time we could examine them.

1. And there are other passages we could consider...

a. There is Solomon's overt cynicism regarding passing on an earthly inheritance in Ecclesiastes 2:18-21.

b. There are gems of wisdom found throughout the book of Proverbs (*e.g. in 13:22, 17:2, 20:21, 28:10*).

c. There are even optimistic passages which, while drawing upon the imagery of the Promised Land, take on a more spiritual, tone. For example, we read in,

i. Isaiah 57:13c ... **But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain.**

and

ii. Psalms 37:9-11 **For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. (10) In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. (11) But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. (cf. vv. 21-22, 28-29)**

(Go ahead and turn to Matthew 5...because those words bring us to...)

## II. Inheritance in the New Testament

A. While preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in,

1. Matthew 5:5 **"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**

a. Canaan...and the words of the 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm...serve as a backdrop to this beatitude.

b. And yet...as we read the New Testament it becomes clear...that the inspired writers are not thinking of some place here below. [...]

2. Instead, Christians are said to...**inherit eternal life...the kingdom of God...salvation...and the promises.**

a. Our inheritance is **among all those who are sanctified.**

b. One that is a **promised eternal inheritance...that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven.**

i. And, of course, those words are just extractions from passages within the New Testament. [...]

B. What is worth noting here...is that in the New Testament...the majority of passages that refer to an inheritance, are referring, to the Real Promised Land...look at what the writer of Hebrews says in,

**1. Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.**

*But what city is that? Keep reading...*

**2. Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (14) For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.**

*That city still hasn't been named...now go to...*

**3. Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,**

*There is the city...and Abraham is one of its inhabitant.*

*That is the inheritance we desire....and about which we so often sing...*

*“This world is not my home...I’m just a passing through.”  
[...]*

C. Of course, there are a few passages in the New Testament that do touch upon earthly inheritances.

1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all relate a version of the Parable of the Tenants (*Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18*)...and, although the details vary...all agree that the tenants murder the Owner of the vineyard's son in order to take His inheritance.

a. Contextually, it is clear that the Son is Christ...and Matthew tells us that for that crime those **wretches** were to receive a **miserable death** (*Matthew 21:38*).

2. A more popular parable that alludes to an inheritance is the Parable of the Prodigal Son which begins in,

a. Luke 15:11-13 **And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. (12) And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. (13) Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.**

i. Many have done that very thing.

3. Finally, there is the demand that prompts the Parable of the Rich Fool in,

a. Luke 12:13-15 **Someone in the crowd said to him (i.e., Jesus), "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." (14) But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (15) And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." [...]**

i. Amen. – But do our lives testify against us? [...]

b. By the way, it is important to note that the word translated as "**covetousness**" here is defined as **idolatry** in Colossians 3:5...because...that is what all of this so often "boils down to." - *Go to 1st Timothy 6. [...]*

D. Now, I know that I have spoken about money and earthly possessions before but...to be clear...the Bible never teaches that those things are intrinsically wrong (*Acts 5:4*).

1. Instead, what matters is...how we acquired them...what we are doing with them...and the emphasis we are placing upon them (*Micah 2:2; Matthew 6:24; Acts 8:20; Ephesians 4:28*).

a. Indeed,

“There is nothing wrong with having possessions as long as our possessions do not possess us.”

[So, what advice can we derive from Scripture...and...]

### III. How should, we, as Christians look upon earthly inheritances?

A. First, it is important to know that what we do, and say, and think regarding an earthly inheritance really does matter.

1. It is wrong to kill a person to take their inheritance (*1<sup>st</sup> Kings 21; Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18*). It is also wrong to defraud them of the same (*Matthew 10:19, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:8*).

2. But is it not also wrong to slander...and accuse...and think evil thoughts of others? - Of course it is (*Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; Ephesians 4:31*) .

3. In 1st Timothy 6:9-10 we are told,

a. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.**

4. These words ring loudly. – But, those who have made money their God, refuse to hear them.

a. As Christ declared in,

i. Matthew 6:24 **“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”** (cf. *Luke 16:13*)

B. In the second place, it is important for us to keep in mind that God owns everything.

1. The Bible declares this...and it implies this...over and over again. (*Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1; 1st Corinthians 10:26; Hebrews 3:4*).).

C. In the third place, because God owns everything...we are merely stewards.

1. God grants us **“life and breath and everything** (*Acts 17:25*).”

a. And, as Christians, we know that we are not our own for we **“were bought with a price** (*1st Corinthians 6:19-20*).” [...]

b. Additionally, in Luke 17:7-10...Jesus relates a parable that indicates that even after we have done all that God commands us to do; we are still **“unworthy servants.”**

i. The point is...God owes us nothing...not even a thank you. [...]

2. But many believe that they are owed something...especially from their parents.

a. And if one thinks they can prooftext this position by appealing to the words of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:14 when Paul says,

i. 2 Corinthians 12:14c **...For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.**

b. I want to remind them that the same Apostle also said,

i. 1 Timothy 5:4 **But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. [...]**

c. Furthermore, Jesus condemned those who were neglected to care for their parents in,

i. Matthew 15:1-9 **Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, (2) “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” (3) He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (4) For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ (5) But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” (6) he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. (7) You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: (8) “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; (9) in vain do they worship**

**me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”** (cf. *Mark 7:1-13*)

D. In the fourth place an earthly inheritance should be looked upon as a gift.

1. We have seen how the physical inheritance the Israelites received...namely, the earthly Promised Land...was a gift from God.

2. We have also seen how our spiritual inheritance in Christ...namely, the heavenly Promised Land, our salvation...is also presented as a gift from God (*Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7*). [...]

3. And should we not look upon an earthly inheritance as a gift? – Of course we should. [...]

a. You see, there are really just two ways to look upon an earthly inheritance. Either...

i. You look upon it as a gift.

or

ii. You look upon it as something you are owed.

And those who look upon it as something they are owed seem to be working from a flawed premise...as well as a sense of entitlement.

Go to Matthew 20.

4. In Matthew 20:1-16 Jesus relates The Parable of the Laborers.

a. Therein, the **kingdom of heaven** is likened to a **master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard**. The laborers agree upon their wages and go to work.

However, over the course of the day, the master continues to hire additional laborers. When the time comes for them to receive their wages, the master pays all of them equally.

i. Now whether this Parable has to do with an individual's salvation...or, more likely, the Jews being resentful of the salvation offered to Gentiles...matters very little for the point I am making.

b. Look at,

i. Matthew 20:10-12 **Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. (11) And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, (12) saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’**

What were they saying?

They were saying it was not fair.

c. And how does the Master respond?

i. Matthew 20:13-15 **But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? (14) Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. (15) Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’**

What is the point? - The point is...

Those who look upon an earthly inheritance as a gift...are unlikely to bear any ill will toward other recipients of it.

but

Those who look upon it as something they have earned...are likely to begrudgingly receive it...and bear ill will toward other recipients of it. [...]

d. Now, to be clear...there is nothing wrong with agreeing upon a wage...working for it...and receiving it. - After all, Christ has said,

i. **“The laborer deserves his wages.”** (*1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7*) [...]

e. But, let me put it like this, if the only reason you are helping out someone is so that you can get a “bigger piece of the pie when they die” then you need to know that when you do...*or should I say if you do*...then you have received your reward in full. (*Matthew 6:2, 5, 16*) [...]

## Conclusion

A. It is fitting for us to close with the words...and the warning of...

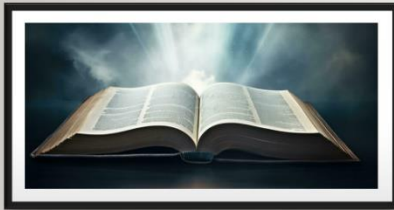
**1. Luke 12:13-21 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (14) But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (15) And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (16) And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ (18) And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ (20) But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”**

B. Invitation...

## EARTHLY INHERITANCE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Matthew 16:24-26

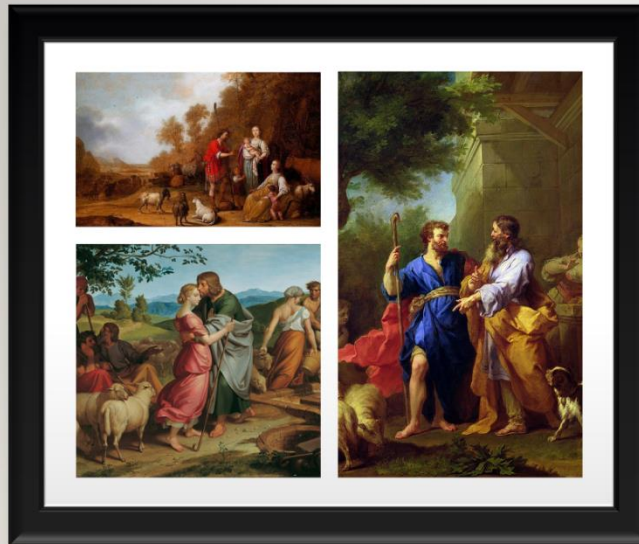
Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”



## INTRODUCTION

## I. INHERITANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

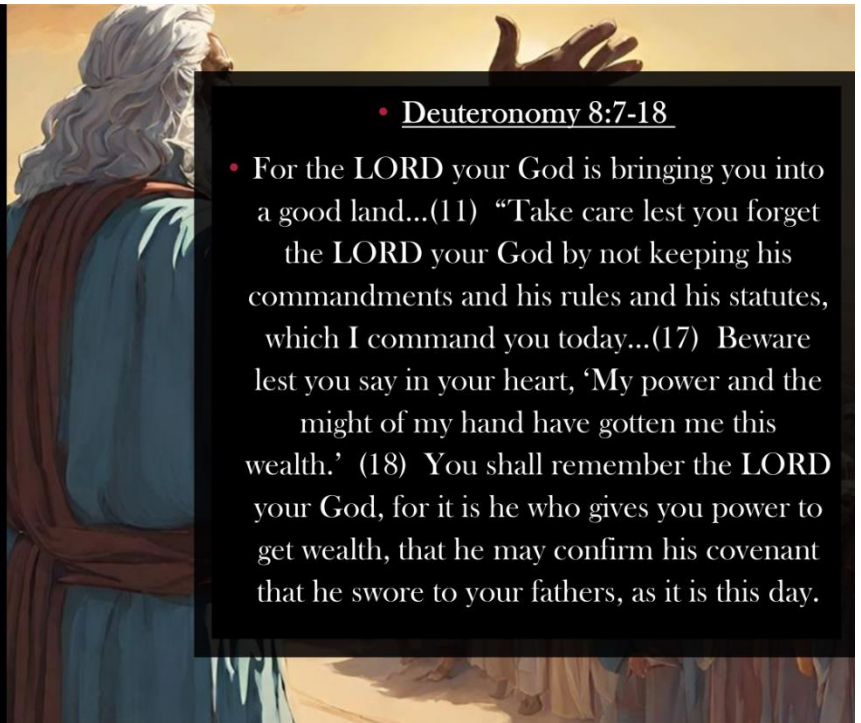
- Genesis 2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, (17) but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
- Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—



- Genesis 31:1-4 Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth." (2) And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. (3) Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." (4) So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was...
- Genesis 31:14-16 Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? (15) Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. (16) All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

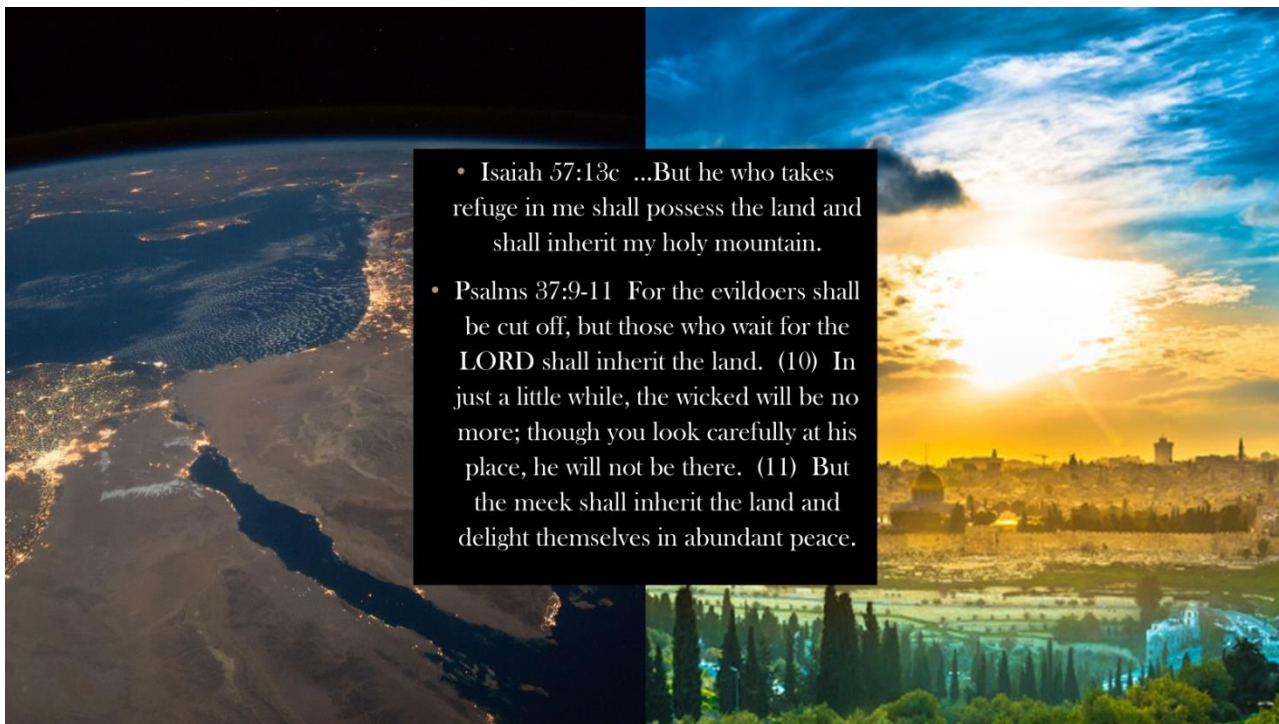
Deuteronomy 9:1-6

“Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you...(3) Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you. (4) “Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. (5) Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (6) “Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.



• Deuteronomy 8:7-18

- For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land...(11) “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today...(17) Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ (18) You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.



## II. INHERITANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

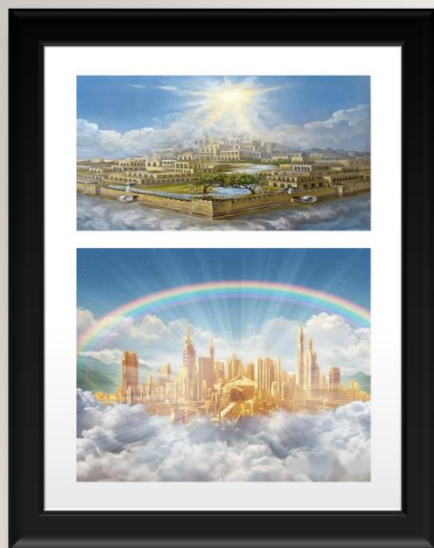
### MATTHEW 5:5

“BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.”



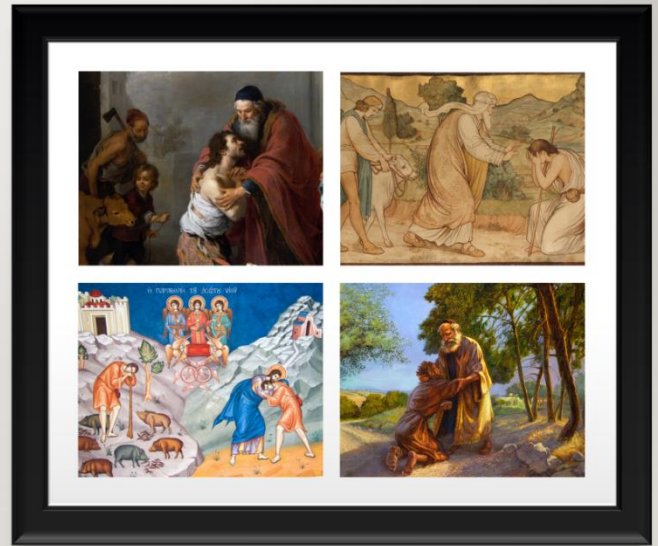
- Hebrews 11:8-10

- By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.



- Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (14) For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.
- Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

- Luke 15:11-13 And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. (12) And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. (13) Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

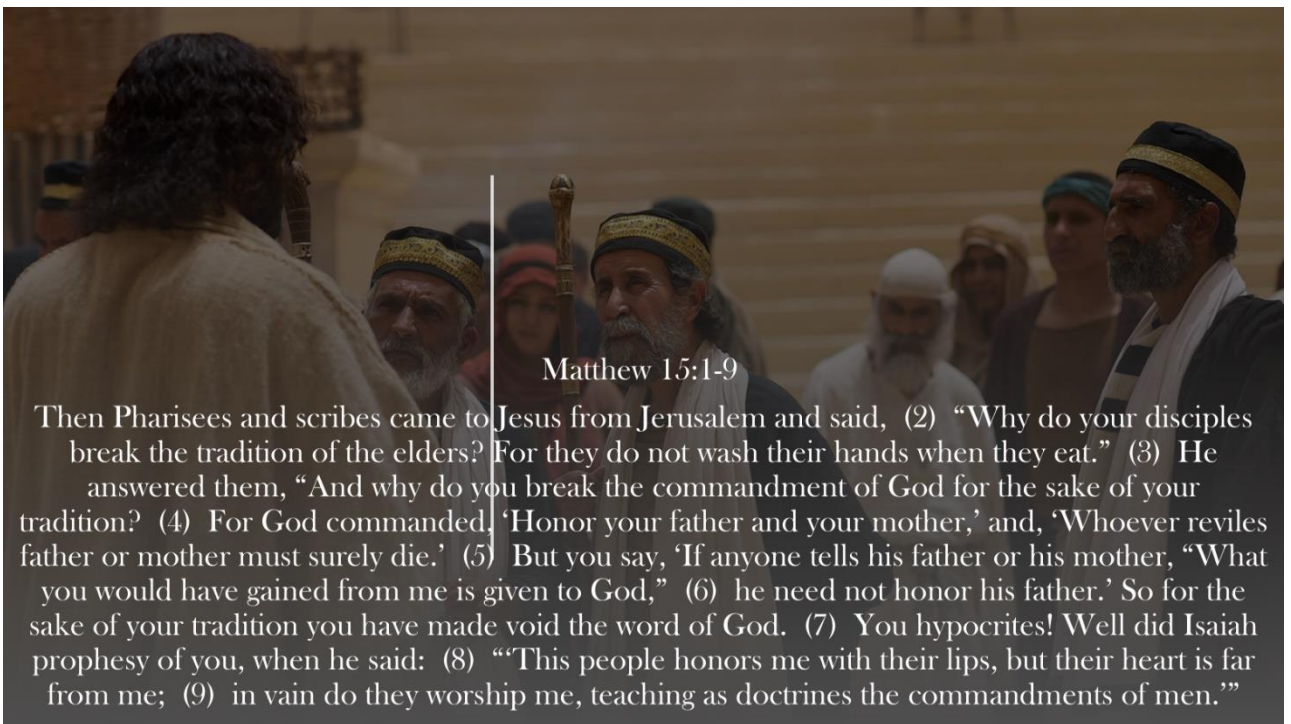


- Luke 12:13-15 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (14) But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (15) And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”



- 1 Timothy 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.
- Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

- 2 Corinthians 12:14c For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.
- 1 Timothy 5:4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

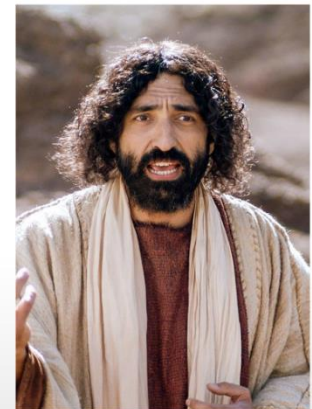


- Matthew 20:10-12 Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. (11) And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, (12) saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”
- Matthew 20:13-15 But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? (14) Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. (15) Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’



## CONCLUSION

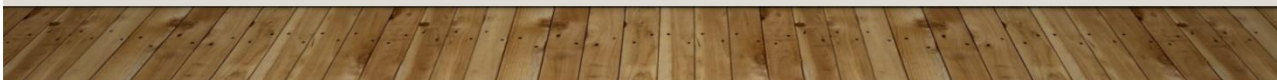
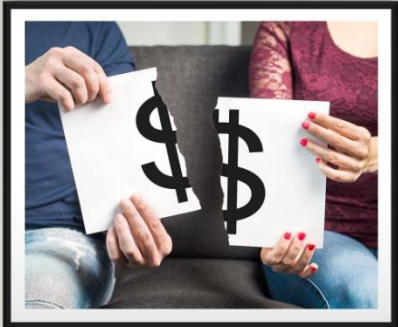
- Luke 12:13-21 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (14) But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (15) And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (16) And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ (18) And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ (20) But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”



## **EARTHLY INHERITANCE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"



## Appendix G

### Post-Sermon Survey

#### “Earthly Inheritance: A Biblical Perspective.”

**Directions:** Please share your thoughts regarding today’s message.

**Use this scale:**

1 = Strongly Disagree / 2 = Disagree / 3 = Neutral / 4 = Agree / 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I believe that this is an important topic to address in a sermon.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

2. The passages of Scripture referenced within the sermon were adequate and relevant.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

3. The interpretation of the Biblical text was reasonable.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

4. Any illustrations/examples provided were engaging and helpful.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

5. The application made within the message was practical and related well to my life.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

6. The sermon was well-presented.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

7. The length of the sermon was appropriate.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

8. I would recommend this sermon to others.

[1]      [2]      [3]      [4]      [5]

9. Prior to this sermon, had you ever heard a sermon regarding earthly inheritances?

Yes      No      I do not recall.

10. Do you have any other thoughts on today’s topic?

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## Appendix H

### Money Matters – The Parable of the Unjust Steward) (Scripture Reading – James 2.1-9)

#### Introduction

A. Greetings...*Go ahead and turn to Luke 16...*

B. The title of tonight's sermon is... "Money Matters – The Parable of the Unjust Steward"

1. And if you are thinking, "Money doesn't matter!"

a. Well you may be right in one sense...but you are wrong in another.

2. Money, and what we do with it, really does matter and I'll tell you especially when it matters...

a. When Jesus had something to say about it.

3. This evening I want to talk to you about a matter pertaining to money.

a. And I want to do so by examining an unpopular parable, possibly the most unpopular of all the parables...

i. "The Parable of the Unjust Steward" found in Luke 16.1-9. [...]

C. Because of its difficulty...many teachers and preachers overlook this parable...and based upon the work I have done upon it recently...let me just say that in both the academic and religious world it is often perverted.

1. I will not get into all that...but let me just say this...

a. This parable is so very important...when it is understood properly...it has one of the most straightforward and powerful statements...in all of Scripture...regarding what we should do with the money with which God has blessed us. [...]

D. Jesus had a lot to say about money.

1. In fact, 16 out of the 38 parables He spoke...were concerned with how we are to handle money and possessions.

a. Some of those parables He interpreted for us...others He did not.

b. Now...although He did not interpret this one for us...it can still be understood.

i. And I want to remind you...of this...

According to Jesus...parables reveal truth to those who are spiritually ready to receive it...but, parables conceal truth from those who are not.

So my prayer is that this evening...God's Spirit will grant us an understanding of this passage...so that we might clearly see how we can apply it to our own lives.

[Let's notice in the first place...]

## I. The Predicament

A. Inspiration:

1. Luke 16:1-3 **He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. (2) And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' (3) And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.**

B. Interpretation:

1. Luke does not have a lot of great things to say about rich people...in fact the New Testament does not have a lot of great things to say about them.

a. Here we are introduced to a rich man.

i. And this rich man has a manager...a steward...who is wasting his stuff.

b. And when the rich man hears the charges...he does not investigate...he simply decides to fire his employee.

i. You might think that that is unfair...but...

ii. It seems that the manager really was guilty for two reasons...

#1 We read of no objection being offered.

#2 Jesus Himself characterizes the man as a (the) “dishonest manager” in v. 8. [...]

d. So, what happens?

i. The manager then starts thinking of all his options...his...backup plan 😊.

2. But what is our “backup plan?”

a. And...are we, even now, thinking of these words in only an earthly way? [...]

#### C. Illustration:

1. Have you ever known you were about to lose your job?

a. What did you do?

b. What would you do?

2. Would you look into “unemployment?”

a. They did not have one of those programs back then.

3. Would you try to find another job as quickly as possible?

a. Perhaps...

4. Would you do something illegal?

a. I hope not...but some have...some would.

5. Maybe you would just make the most of the severance package, and/or that last paycheck you got.

#### D. Application:

1. This manager springs into action.

a. What action would we take?

- i. A better question might be...What action are we now taking?

[Think about that as we notice...]

## II. The Plan & The Procedure

### A. Inspiration:

1. Luke 16:4-7 **I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'** (5) **So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'** (6) **He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.'** He said to him, **'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'** (7) **Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?'** He said, **'A hundred measures of wheat.'** He said to him, **'Take your bill, and write eighty.'**

### B. Interpretation:

1. There are a few ways this passage is understood...some think...
  - a. That the steward is simply removing dishonest interest that he had placed upon the goods...*by the master (in which case the steward is a "Robin Hood" type figure)*...or by himself.
  - b. Others think that the steward here is simply stealing from his honest master.
    - i. The view is that he is doing the same thing here that he had been doing all along.
  - c. And still others...think that the steward is simply foregoing his own, lawful, commission...to ingratiate himself to his master's debtors.
    - i. In other words...there is no dishonesty illustrated by these words...rather it is his shrewdness. [...]
2. And let me make this point clear...
  - a. Regardless of one's preferred approach to this portion of the text...the parable can still make perfect sense.
  - b. *Why?*

*Because the steward does not have to be exemplary in every regard to us...he just needs to be exemplary in the one regard Jesus stresses. [...]*

C. Illustration:

1. Have you ever had a job you did not like?

a. I have worked many jobs in high school...and in college...and after college.

i. And...my least favorite...

Door to door sales for Aerus/Electrolux.

For a couple months I worked as a vacuum cleaner salesman. [...]

b. I got paid by commission.

i. And because of that I was able to sell those machines, for a great deal more than they were worth...

a. But I could lower my cut all the way down to 0% if I wanted to...and occasionally I did...and when I did...I suppose one might say that I gained a friend.

D. Application:

1. What are we doing with opportunities that come our way?

[Keep thinking about that as we come now to...]

### III. The Praise & The Point

A. Inspiration:

**1. Luke 16:8-9 The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. (9) And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.**

B. Interpretation:

1. Regarding these words one writer has said,

a. “The central question is why the master would commend the actions of his steward. Traditionally, exegetes have distinguished between the steward's dishonesty and his prudence: the master commends him for the latter, not the former. This interpretation is accurate as far as it goes, but it does not explain why the master would commend him for a prudent action if his action were also ethically dubious.” – *Delbert Burkett*

2. But this can easily be handled.

a. Now I agree that...

i. It really does seem unlikely that, if you were getting fired based upon allegations that you were wasteful (i.e., stealing)...and your employer caught you in the act as you were leaving...that he or she would say,

“Hey that was a wise thing to do! Now that I have proof of your dishonesty, I commend you!”

ii. Admittedly, your boss could just be glad to see you go.

iii. However, like I said a moment ago...it is possible that the actions undertaken in verses 4-7 are not dishonest.

iv. Thus, maybe, just maybe...your boss would recognize that you used your last, lawful, paycheck to secure your future...and so he or she would commend you for that.

3. Another item that should be addressed is the reference to “unrighteous wealth” in verse 9 (μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας).

1. Many argue that the words necessarily refer to “wealth gained illegally.”

a. However, those who care about context will see that Luke employs these words again just two verses later (v. 11 - εἰ οὖν ἐν τῷ ἀδίκῳ μαμωνᾷ πιστοὶ οὐκ ἐγένεσθε, τὸ ἀληθινὸν τίς ὑμῖν πιστεύσει;)).

2. What is the point?

a. The point is...in this context, unrighteous wealth is all the wealth of this world...inasmuch as it is contrasted with that which is the true (wealth), namely the riches of heaven.

C. Illustration/Application:

1. Of course, the overall point of this parable is clear...

a. In fact...Jesus makes an observation...and then He utters an exhortation immediately following the parable.

i. And it is application that does not need to be interpreted...as much as it needs to be believed.

And when I say believed...I mean believing Jesus enough to actually do what He says. [...]

2. Look at the second half of verses 8-9.

a. **"For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 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."**

3. Now, the spiritual application is this,

a. The allegedly wasteful...definitely dishonest...and worldly manager...when he learned that he was going to be jobless...used the means at his disposal (whether lawfully or unlawfully)...to make friends in order to secure his future in this life.

b. How much more so should godly people...use the means at their disposal (since they know it is fleeting)...to make friends in this life (e.g., by being kind to the poor)... so that they may secure their future in the next life. [...]

i. Does that make sense?

It should.

c. By the way, did you notice how there is a lesser to greater approach here? (The technical term is *qal wahomer*.)

i. It is the same argument style as when Jesus says in,

**Luke 11:13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

and this style is also alluded to in,

**Luke 18:6-7 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. (7) And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”**

[ As we close...]

## **Conclusion**

A. Jesus’ provides a second, possibly even a third, conclusion, in verses 10-13,

**1. Luke 16:10-13 “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. (11) If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? (12) And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? (13) No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”**

a. Amen...that is an important lesson. [...]

B. You know, all of us have been blessed by God. [...]

1. He has given us life...and He has showered us with many blessings.

a. But too often...I we are guilty of wasting what He has given us.

i. Our Talent...our Time...and our Treasure...including the money with which He has blessed us. [...]

B. Right now...we are stewards...and we have a job...a job to faithfully serve our Master. [...]

1. But one day...our time of service...here below...it will end. [...]

a. And so we had better make the most of the time we are given.

i. We need to plan right now...and we need to use our money to be a blessing to others.

C. It is fitting to close with the words of,

**1. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (18) They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (19) thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.**

D. Invitation...

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