

God's Resolution Series
"Honor the Lord from your wealth"
Proverbs 3.9-10

Introduction:

Currently we are considering six characteristics that our heavenly Father desires to implement into our lives in 2017 recorded in Proverbs chapter three. We began this series of sermons by looking at the foundational truth to "*trust in the Lord with all of our hearts.*" Last week we considered the admonition "*do not be wise in your own eyes.*" These sermons are posted online if you missed them.

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This morning we come to Proverbs 3.9-10 reads:

*Honor the Lord from your wealth
And from the first of all your produce;
So your barns will be filled with plenty
And your vats will overflow with new wine.*

The topic of money (managing it, saving more, spending less) is always on the top 10 list of New Year's Resolution. No one can avoid the issue of money. Rich or poor, everyone has to deal with money one way or another. The stress of having too much credit card debt, college loan payments, or medical bills can weigh on a person and can cause severe anxiety and depression. Most married couples have experienced financial stress in their marriage, which is one of the leading causes of divorce. It's not just the lack of money or indebtedness that causes these problems. Sometimes too much money causes problems too (even though Barb and I have never had that problem). But couples can have a difference of opinion, attitudes, and perspectives about money that can also cause problems.

Again we see the proverb follows a simple pattern of stating the main admonition that is then followed by parallel point:

*Honor the Lord from your wealth
And from the first of all your produce;*

Then a promise is stated that is then followed by a parallel promise:

*So your barns will be filled with plenty
And your vats will overflow with new wine.*

People often accuse churches of talking too much about money. So, I went through the sermons archives and discovered that March of 2013 was the last time I preached on the topic of money. So, almost 4 years ago!

Some would say that four years is too long especially when you understand the importance the Bible places on the topic of money. The Bible offers more than 2,000 verses on money. This is astounding when you consider that the Bible only offers 500 verses on prayer and fewer than 500 verses on faith. 15 percent of everything Jesus ever taught was on the topic of money and possessions — more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined. Nearly half of His parables are on the topic of money and possessions. In addition, one in every seven verses in the New Testament deals with this topic. Just the sheer amount of Scripture devoted to this topic should cause us to pause and consider that God desires to help us in the area of money and possessions – this big area in our lives.

For God, it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor. A person's attitude and perspective about money and possessions is always the primary point. God calls all of us to be good stewards, good managers, and cheerful givers. For God, it doesn't matter if you are the widow who gave her last penny in the temple offering or the rich young ruler God is always looking at our hearts. For God, perspective trumps poverty and attitude triumphs over annual earnings. For God, there is a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and our view of money. As Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Mt.6.21) Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation said, "There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook." I have seen this to be true throughout my pastoral ministry. People come to Christ. They have a passion for Christ to sanctify their lives. They really start growing in Christ but usually the last area of sanctification is "their pocketbook." It starts with the head, moves to the heart, and then the pocketbook.

Before we look directly at our text in Proverbs three, let me give you a summary of what God's Word teaches about a proper perspective of possessions and money.

First, Recognize that God owns everything.

*The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it. (Ps.24.1)*

Secondly, Recognize that you earn but God enables.

*But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to
make wealth, (Dt.8.18a)*

Thirdly, Recognize that our commitment to God relates to every part of our lives.

*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
(1Cor.10.31)*

Proverbs three tells us, "*Honor the Lord from your wealth.*" I know that someone here is thinking, "Well, this doesn't pertain to me because I'm not wealthy." But the fact is you probably wealthier than you think. According to a Gallup Poll conducted in December 2013, the medium individual income worldwide is \$3000 annually. So, how are you doing? The fact is that the majority of us, regardless of our tax bracket, are the rich in this present world and God's Word instructs us *not to be conceited or to fix our hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.* (1Tim.6.17)

It really doesn't matter if you live in America or Africa the Bible is telling us to "*honor the Lord from your wealth.*" It doesn't matter if you earn \$3000 annually or \$300,000, or \$3 million. The admonition is the same. *Honor the Lord from your wealth.*

Well, how actually does a person *honor the Lord from their wealth?*

To begin answering this question I want to revisit the first two admonitions we have looked at in this sermon series. How do we *honor the Lord from our wealth?* First, is by trusting the Lord with all of our hearts and not leaning on our own understanding. We must trust what God says about money in His Word and not lean on our own understanding. God is the greatest financial advisor and we should trust His Word. Secondly, how do we *honor the Lord from our wealth?* By not becoming wise in our own eyes. We must trust that God knows best and that He desires the best for our lives even when it comes with how we manage our money. The acid test of humility towards God is what you do with your money. As Jesus told us, "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*" (Mt.6.24)

As I mentioned last week, God is not opposed to our achievements or to our achieving success. As a matter of fact, God desires for us to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, to subdue it, and rule over it. (Gen.1.28) Our Church Fathers called this the "Cultural Mandate." As we saw, Nebuchadnezzar was a great military leader, a world ruler, and a brilliant engineer. Nebuchadnezzar's success wasn't the problem. The problem is that he believed that his success was a product of his mighty power and for the glory of his majesty. Nebuchadnezzar believed that he was the author of his success and that glory was due to him. Clearly, Nebuchadnezzar had become wise in his own eyes and as a result did not honor the Lord with his wealth. (Dan.4)

Being rich or successful is not the problem. Many of the patriarchs were rich like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There were several rich people who followed Christ like Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and several successful women who were some of Jesus' greatest financial supporters. (Lk.8.1-3) The point is that there is nothing wrong with being wealthy, successful, or being financially rewarded for your labors. The problem is when we don't honor the Lord with our wealth.

Our text gives us clear instruction on how to honor the Lord with our wealth.

*Honor the Lord from your wealth
And from the first of all your produce;*

We honor the Lord from our wealth by giving Him the first of all our earnings. This means that we honor the Lord with the first part not seconds, not leftovers, not scraps, or crumbs, but the first of the first. Actually, the NIV, ESV, Kings James, and New King James all translate verse 9:

*Honor the Lord with your wealth,
with the **firstfruits** of all your crops;*

I believe that the term “firstfruits” is referring to honoring the Lord with the tithe. (2Chr.31.5) You hear me say every Lord’s Day, “Now let us give the Lord His tithe and our offerings and alms.” Tithes, offerings, and alms are the three categories of giving as defined in the Bible. Offerings are special gifts given for special ministry projects like mission trips, property improvements, or particular ministries. Alms are gifts given to help the poor and needy. Both offerings and alms are given at the discretion of giver. The tithe, however, is the Lord’s. It is holy, set apart to the Lord. (Lev.27.30) The tithe is the giving of 10% of our income as firstfruits to the Lord. The first 10% belongs to the Lord. The tithe or firstfruits is the basic rule and practice for honoring the Lord with our wealth. Giving the tithe demonstrates my trust in the Lord. Giving the tithe keeps me humble. Jesus told us to be careful not to neglect the tithe as we seek to demonstrate our love for God and acts of mercy towards others. (Mt.23.23; Lk.11.42)

For some the instruction to honor the Lord with a tithe creates “contribution sticker shock.” “10%! Wow! That’s a lot!” Well, the fact is you might be looking at this the wrong way. First, you really never had it – it never belonged to you – the tithe has always belonged to the Lord. God is just entrusting it to you to see if you will return it or take it for yourself. (Mal.3.8-10) Secondly, giving the tithe demonstrates that you realize that everything you have comes from God and you desire to honor Him with what you have received. I was raised to give the tithe so for me it was never an issue. Barb wasn’t raised in a Christian family but came to Christ in a church that taught the Bible. So, tithing has never been an issue for us but I can understand those, especially young Christians that are shocked when they hear about tithing for the first time.

Everyone who becomes a Christian comes into the Kingdom with excess baggage. For some it was multi-marriages. For others it was bad habits. For some it was bad life choices. Financially some of you when you came to Christ had previously made some big purchases and loans that stretched you to your limits. Some of you came into the Kingdom with indebtedness, school loans, and consequences from some extreme purchases or business decisions.

Coming to Christ is great - forgiveness of sins, a new life, and the hope of eternal life. But now when you hear that you are to honor the Lord with your wealth by giving the firstfruits – well, that just freaks you out and you say, “there is no way that is going to happen.” I understand – I get it. But please understand that past decisions do not give you an excuse to ignore the biblical admonition to honor the Lord with your wealth. In the same way that coming to Christ with the background of multiple marriage doesn’t give you the excuse to ignore the biblical admonition to love your wife and respect your husband and live as one flesh (Eph.5.31-33), so coming to Christ with financial hardship doesn’t give you the excuse to ignore the biblical admonition to honor the Lord with your wealth.

For some you can honor the Lord with your wealth is by going to a Christian financial advisor and developing a comprehension plan to get out of debt so that you will eventually be able to give firstfruits. For others the way you honor the Lord with your wealth is by becoming accountable to a budget that includes giving the Lord a percentage of your earnings. While others its downsizing and getting rid of some unnecessary toys. While for others its simply implementing tithing as part of your life. The fact is that no matter your financial background *God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.* (II Cor.9.8)

I don’t want to come across legalistic and I don’t want this whole tithing thing to discourage or distracted you from the main point, which is to honor the Lord with your wealth. So, let me ask you. Are you honoring the Lord with the firstfruits of your life? Or are you honoring Him with the leftovers? I ask this question not just in reference to your money but in reference to every part of your life. You could be like the Pharisee in one of Jesus’ parables who paid tithes on everything he had but wasn’t pursuing the Kingdom of Christ. (Lk.18.9-14) The point is the Lord desires that we honor Him with the firstfruits of our lives regardless of where we are in our walk with Christ.

Jesus taught us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things will be added to us. (Mt.6.33) So, is seeking God’s Kingdom and His righteousness first in your life or does that come in second, or third, or even last place? God knows that if He has your heart then your pocketbook will follow. God desires that you give yourself to Christ first then everything else will follow. (II Cor.8.5) God desires for you to glorify Christ in every part of your life. God desires that your greatest treasure will be His heavenly kingdom in Christ because He knows that only Christ’s kingdom will bring you eternal happiness.

God desires His best for every part of your life you and this includes your money. But He knows that we all have the tendency to spend money on bread that doesn’t bring fulfillment, and our wages on things that don’t satisfy. (Is.55.2) And God desires to spare us from those disappointments. The Lord knows that moths and rust destroy the treasures of this world and the things that aren’t destroyed by moths and rust thieves can break in and steal. (Mt.6.19-21)

Therefore, instead of fixing your hope on the uncertainty of riches, the Lord would have you fix your hope on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. He desires for you to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, and ready to share. God knows that if you pursue these things that you will store up for yourself a treasure for the future. God know that the pursuit of these things will give you real fulfillment, satisfaction, and the sense that you have taken hold of that which is life indeed. (ITim.6.17-19)

*So your barns will be filled with plenty
And your vats will overflow with new wine.*

Our text this morning continues with the promise that as we honor the Lord with the firstfruits that our barns will be filled with plenty and our vats will overflow with new wine. (Prv.3.10)

This promise is very similar to what the Lord told the Prophet Malachi, *Test Me now in this,* says the Lord of hosts, *“if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.* (Mal.3.10) Of course, we don’t give to get – we give to glorify but God does promise to pour blessings upon us when we honor Him with our wealth. We honor the Lord with our wealth to bring glory and honor to Him who has given us *every good thing and every perfect gift.* (Js.1.17a) We honor the Lord with our wealth to bring glory and honor to Him who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. (ITim.6.17)

Money is morality neutral but what we do with our money has moral consequences. God doesn’t want you to be stressed out with debt. God doesn’t want you to live in guilt because you don’t tithe. God desires to for you to honor Him with your wealth because He knows when you do – you will live with contentment. God desires that you will give yourself to Christ first and then to the gracious work of giving. God desires for you to grow in every area of you life in Christ. He desires that *you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.* (IICor.8.7) God desires that you would be rich in Him by storing up treasures in heaven. (Lk.12.21)

Conclusion:

Brothers and sisters, the Lord desires to do an spiritual audit of our lives. First, are you resting in Christ? Claiming His forgiveness and grace. Secondly, are you honoring the Lord in your life? Are there areas our your life that you are purposely ignoring? Thirdly, are you seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Or are you giving the Lord the leftovers? Lastly, are you honoring the Lord with your wealth and from your firstfruits? Regardless of where we are on the journey lets all give thanks to God for His indescribable gift of grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, that even though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that we through His poverty might become rich. (IICor.9.15; 8.9)