

First Presbyterian Church  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
October 9, 2011  
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Wisdom and Finance

Proverbs 3:9-10, 23: 4-5, I Timothy 6: 6-10, Matthew 6:22-34

The words, “Wisdom and Finance” being placed together might just be an oxymoron in these crazy days of budget and funding insanity. We wonder if there are any “financial geniuses” who have the wisdom to guide us through these troubled times. Yet, we still seek out the wisdom of financial advisors, some good and some of questionable virtue. Our congregation is greatly blessed to be guided by wise financial advisors of high integrity. We also know we need wisdom and finances for the basics in our daily lives. Even Paul wrote in I Timothy of the necessity of food and clothing, and added “be content with these.” Today, we might add shelter, transportation and medical care. Money, wealth or finances can be very helpful tools, “if” we use them wisely. So, wisdom and finance still exist as compatible partners in some aspects of our lives.

According to Proverbs, the teaching of Jesus and the writings of Paul, we “best be” tying our finances to wisdom. “Wisdom and Finance” are deeply intertwined within our relationship to God, our neighbors, and ourselves. Let’s look for God’s guidance in these passages, as we begin with the “ourselves” part of this relationship.

We find God’s guidance in the Proverbs, a collection of wisdom sayings. Wealth is mentioned quite often in this book. For example, hear again the words of advice in Proverbs 23: 4. “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist.” How easily this can happen to us. I know one Chicago stocker broker who found himself so tied up in making more money for others and himself that his health seriously broke down to the extent that death was not far behind. He had worn himself out to get rich. He found that great wealth had become his god and it was killing him. He wisely heeded the words of Proverbs and quit to do something that earned less money, but would not cost him his life. I am glad he was still alive to tell me his story. We all have heard of other stories of people dying from heart attacks or suffering mental breakdowns in the drive to accumulate wealth. Maybe this is our story, I hope not. If we need some wisdom about finances, and want to help ourselves we need to learn: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist.”

If accumulating wealth is not wearing us out, then we might have the problem of security and wealth. How much do we need to feel secure? Or does our wealth really make us secure? As someone who is fast approaching the so called magic age of 65—I am still trying to accept that fact—I receive a lot of mail about long term healthcare insurance. In this mail I am asked often in urgent terms, “Will you have enough money for health care in your “later years”? And, there are those mailers challenging me about my retirement funds—“Will you have enough??” Or, “Will there be sufficient Social Security to carry you until you pass on?” These are valid questions that many of us may be asking. Also, I know I feel more secure when I have enough money to pay bills in a timely manner. Yet, should this “enough or not enough” be the basis of yours or my security?

Again the Proverbs passage speaks to this. “When your eyes light upon wealth, it is gone; for suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven.” Preacher Thomas Long writes: “Jesus’ words in Matthew also warn us against the perennial human tendency to stockpile wealth as a hedge against insecurity. The problem with investing our sense of worth in cash and possessions is that such an investment is always at peril. It is never safe. Cash can be stolen; even Porsches and Cadillacs rust; corporations collapse; moths eat dinner jackets. The ‘lifestyles of the rich and famous’ are lifestyles of the always vulnerable and ever fearful. Moreover, there is always someone around who has more than we do, and the quest to keep up is an endless burden. Deadbolts, safety deposit boxes, tax shelters—none of them finally protect what we really desire; none of them make secure a treasure worthy of our hearts or our sense of security.” [Matthew, Long, pg. 74](#)

And what about what Paul wrote? “Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.” Not much hope in the eternal security of wealth is there? It is like Rev. Roger Rapp told us in a sermon about 14 months ago. “You never see a U-Haul hitched behind a hearse or a casket.”

“What our hearts really desire, of course, is to count-to count *forsomething* and to count *to someone*. To come to the end of a day or the end of a life-with the satisfaction of having stood for what is good, with the joy of having been loved and having loved well in return, with the memory of having shown mercy, and with the peace of having walked with God these are the true treasures, the treasures of the kingdom, a fortune no thief can plunder.” [Matthew, Long, pg 74](#)

“The decision whether to store up treasures on earth or treasures in heaven is not one of mere financial planning; it is one of basic orientation. Jesus’ call to ‘store up for yourselves treasures in heaven’ is not a question of prudence. It is more radical than that; it is a question of vision and freedom-what a person sees and what holds a person captive. If a person sees life as a gift” of God’s grace, “a bountiful outpouring of God’s providence, then that person is free to hold possessions with a light grasp, be generous toward others,” and the ministry of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, if life is seen as a competitive struggle between winners and losers over limited resources, then one is a slave to this struggle, and the only viable creed is ‘Where’s Mine?’ [Matthew, Long, pg. 74](#)

“It is this matter of basic orientation to which Jesus is pointing with the two images of the eye, and the slave master. First, he compares the human spirit to the eye, which is ‘the lamp of the body.’ Today, we think of the human eye as a receiver of light, but in the ancient world the eye was considered to be a *source* of light that illumined reality. So, the crucial issue is what one sees. If one’s eye is healthy-that is, if one essentially has a generous spirit and sees the world in a benevolent light-then one’s total life will be abounding.” As Proverbs 3 says, “Give God the first fruit” and then at least figuratively, “your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” “On the other hand, if one basically sees the world in a pinched and selfish way, then one’s whole existence, even acts of apparent charity, will be” done begrudgingly.

“Next, Jesus reminds his hearers that God and wealth are two demanding and competing masters. If a slave had two masters, what was to be done if these masters gave conflicting commands? The slave must choose, must turn toward one in loyalty and *away from* the other. God and wealth have different tasks in mind for their slaves. Wealth says, ‘Because of your superb credit, you are among the elite chosen to receive a Gold Card.’ God says, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ Wealth says, ‘Indulge yourself, you’ve earned it.’ God says, ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.’ There are two masters, but only one servant. Living *the* good life and living a good life pull in opposite directions. One cannot serve both God and wealth.” [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 74-75

“Ultimately, whether one serves God or wealth depends upon trust. The appeal to trust God is the goal of Jesus’ picture of the birds of the air, who are fed by God even though they neither fret nor plan, and the lilies of the field, gloriously and colorfully clothed even though they have never touched a needle and thread. If God takes care of the birds and the wild flowers, Jesus promises, then surely God will take care of us. So, not only are we freed from compulsive anxiety about vain luxuries, we do not even need to worry about the basics, about food or clothing, because our God knows we need all these things (Matt. 6:31-32) and will provide.” [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 75

“At first, Jesus’ words about the birds and the lilies, lovely as they are, are not very compelling. Sure, birds and lilies don’t worry about life, but they also don’t have mortgages, car payments, grocery bills, and college tuitions to keep them awake at night. All of us would like to be relieved of worry and anxiety, but Jesus appears to be suggesting an unrealistic strategy--‘look at the birds, look at the lilies’-to which one is tempted to reply, ‘Yes, but look at the bills?’” [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 75

“Jesus, however, is not suggesting that human beings can be like birds or lilies. Indeed, he means to emphasize the difference between birds and lilies, on the one hand, and human beings, on the other.” Compared with human beings, birds and lilies or grasses of the field appear to live simpler lives and seem to be less important in creation. So if God cares so lavishly for the lowly birds and lilies how much more will God provide for human beings. [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 74

“Also, the verbs *look* at the birds of the air and *consider* the lilies of the field are, in Greek, *very* strong verbs. They mean to suggest more than a casual glance; they invite us to study and to scrutinize the carefree world of nature. Jesus commands us to look, *really* look, at a world where God provides freely and lavishly, a world where anxiety plays no part, where worry is not a reality. Jesus invites us to allow our imaginations to enter such a world, to compare this world with the world in which we must live out our lives.” [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 75-6

“The rent is still due, of course, and the department store still expects payment for jeans and coats, but we have seen this other world, this world of God’s gracious and tender care, and it promises to overthrow the power of anxiety. We will still wonder if we can balance the checkbook this month, but there is nothing in this world that can take away what God provides-dignity, a sense of worth, the confidence of being treasured in the heart of God.” [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 76

“It is fascinating that this section of Jesus’ sermon on wealth closes with a

statement not about wealth at all, but about worry: 'So do not worry about tomorrow.' Jesus brings us back to the problem of security of which he was quite aware. "The hunger to acquire wealth, the temptation to serve possessions as our master rather than the living God, grows out of greed. But, at its profoundest level it has to do with anxiety about the status, security, and survival of the self. "Our hearts are restless," said Augustine, 'until they rest in Thee,' and restless anxiety over what tomorrow may hold is a sign that our hearts have not found their true home." [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 74

"There is a kind of worry about the coming day that is normal, even healthy. Tomorrow's chemistry test or job interview is bound to provoke concern, and this command 'do not worry about tomorrow' is not an invitation to finesse the exam or to waltz into the interview unprepared. Rather, it speaks to the deeper, and more basic fear that something is out there in the future that can destroy our basic worth as a human being." We are frightened "that there is something finally stronger than God's care, some silent killer shark swimming toward us from the future." [Matthew](#), Long, pg. 74

"The statement that 'today's trouble is enough for today' was probably a popular saying that becomes, in the context of Jesus' sermon, a kingdom saying. Those who know that God summons the sun to rise are confident that, whatever tomorrow brings, it will also bring God with it. So, they are content to leave tomorrow's trouble to tomorrow, to roll up their sleeves, and as children of the kingdom face the problems that walk through the door today." They know that "Wisdom and Finances" go together and seek the ever-present and all-wise God in Jesus Christ to guide them. If we are among them, great! If not, shall we join them? [Matthew](#) by Long Pgs 74-76