

Satan Exposed: Our Treasure

Our church has been going through a “Walk of Faith” campaign for the last several weeks. The four “pillars” of the campaign, if they can be called such, are our Time, Treasure, Talents, and Testimony. The basic drive of the campaign is that God wants us to, in giving Him our lives, use our time, treasure, talents, and testimony for His Kingdom.

Many of the messages in our culture today, though, run very contrary to this idea. I see Satan well on his way toward robbing us of all four of those pieces of our lives. This post is exposing the first robbery — our treasure.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” — Mt. 6:19-21

Over the course of our lives, we (Americans) will make thousands, perhaps millions, of dollars. We will acquire material objects and gifts from other people. We possess more materially than any other culture in the history of humankind. Our will determines what becomes of this great wealth. We could spend it fruitlessly on food, fattening ourselves to no profit. We could invest the resources and create a huge retirement account to carry us through our final years and create a foundation for our children. Or we could invest our money and resources into the Kingdom, by providing for the needs of others around us.

Of those options, Satan wins with all except the last. Our bodies will perish. All our material possessions will perish. They are members of Satan’s broken kingdom. This is why Jesus tells us to invest into His Kingdom, where these things will not be destroyed or stolen. Many of us agree with this mentally, but only deceive ourselves, because we live a very different story

indeed.

As an example, the average American makes a car payment of \$350 every month. Dave Ramsey fans know that if this money were invested into an IRA, after many years you would have several million dollars. Invested into the Kingdom, though, millions of meals could be served, houses built for homeless families, chains loosed, bonds broken... the work God has assigned to His People would be accomplished.

But the madness doesn't end with a car payment. The average household has almost \$10,000 in credit card debt. Every American should own a new car, lease a nice SUV, have a couple wave runners for the summer and a condo in Florida for the winter. Before long, every dollar that comes into the two-income family is immediately sent back out to make payments for our silly luxuries. Jesus warns us that rust will destroy our cars and boats and homes, and that moths will ruin our expensive clothes. That's the way life goes. Yet still, we go on, month after month, chasing foolishly after the things the world promises will provide us with pleasure.

And there we find our true god. We say we believe that our time is eternal because we're following Jesus. But if we're brutally honest, we have bought the world's line: "Eat, drink, and be merry — for tomorrow we die." And because of this, we spend every last penny on making our lives as enjoyable as possible. We buy the latest big-screen TV and speaker set so we can play the latest video games in hi-def, surround sound quality. We make sure

we own the shiniest, most exquisite vehicle on the lot, lest we look less fortunate than Mr. Jones next door.

Why? Why do we follow the same drum beat by which the rest of the world marches?

Because we've bought the Lie! Jesus said to invest your money into the treasures of the Kingdom — selflessly giving to all who need. Satan counters this command by placing in front of us immediate fun and enjoyment, and we fall hook, line, and sinker.

When will we ever learn? Perhaps on our death bed. Perhaps when we look back over 60, 70, 80 years of life and realize the only thing we've ever invested in is a rusty car and a life of fun that is forever gone then we will weep in agony as our eyes are open. We will weep even more bitterly when we see that our children and grand children are now taking the same foolish road of life, and there's nothing we can do about it anymore. They, too, have been swallowed up by the Enemy.

The only hope we have is to believe. Believe John when he says that this world and its desires are *all passing away* (1 Jn. 2:15ff). Believe Jesus when he pleads with us to store for ourselves treasures in heaven. Believe that we are blinded and fooled by the world and its slogans. Cling to what is good and abhor what is evil. Repent and believe, and we will most certainly be saved from ruin.

Satan has tricked us. He has lured us away to be slaughtered. Absolutely nothing we possess is ours. It has all been granted to us by God, from whom all good and perfect gifts come. But He has not given these things to us so that we can build our own kingdom of pleasure. He

has given to us so that we may be light and salvation to those around us. We are the hands and feet of our King while He is away. We are to put our money toward the family with none. Our ample car is perfect for the single mother whose van just died. Our spare bedroom is an incredible tool for the man who can't get back on his feet!

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." — Mt. 25:34-36

I assure you, whatever you do for the least of us, you do for our King. Invest richly in His people. May He return to find His people serving wholeheartedly and with great power and effectiveness!

Satan Exposed: Our Time

"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." — Eph. 5:15-16.

Call me old-fashioned, but I often wonder what life must have been like in the old farming community, where you worked hard for the first half of the day and then relaxed and enjoyed your community the second half of the day. Maybe my visions are a little idealistic, but I think we've come a long way in filling every spare minute of our days with stuff.

While talking about how Satan steals our treasure, I pointed out how Satan pulls on our heart's lust cord and lures us away to wrap all of our income into payments on "must have" items. It's no surprise, then, to see him doing exactly the same thing with our time. And, just as not all the things we buy are inherently sinful, so the things we spend our time doing are not necessarily sinful either. But the problem comes when all of our time is invested back here in this earth — in Satan's kingdom.

Unlike days gone by, families now need two incomes. And not just a main income and a supplemental income, but two big incomes from two career-driven individuals. We need those incomes to support the payments on all of the toys I spoke of in my last article. We need that money because it provides us security in a very shifty world. We need that money to boost our pride in what we have and what we have done.

And because of all this, the web starts to envelope us. Our money and treasure have all been invested into the lusts of our eyes and the lusts of our flesh. Everything our flesh wants, we must give it. It is our master, after all. And now our time also is invested into making the money necessary for fulfilling those desires. And when we run out of things to

buy and have money left over, we use the remainder to feed our pride in what we have. And when we have time left over, we enroll ourselves into activities that also feed our pride in what we have done. And what our kids have done. We don't have to work hard to imagine conversations like this:

Busy Mom 1: "I just don't have time to worry about the homeless and the needy. I work eight hours a day, but then have to pick up Timmy from day care and drop Shelly off at soccer practice. Bill's car broke down, so I have to run him to and from work, too!"

Busy Mom 2: "You think THAT'S bad?! I have four kids to cart around! Band practice, soccer practice, ballet rehearsals, hockey games, marching band, play tryouts, cub scouts, and... Oh! Cub scouts! I forgot to pick up Brad!"

We raise kids we don't even know only to send them out into the world full of credit cards and school debt so they can run in the same rat race that devoured us! We don't tell them to love God and love their neighbor, but to love sports and performances and anything else they can brag about being involved with. And if they stay involved in enough things, then parents have that much more to brag about themselves. Why do we need "Proud parent of _____" bumper stickers if not to brag about our accomplishments as parents? Why don't we see any bumper stickers saying, "Humble, poor parent of a kid who loves and obeys Jesus"? Because humble people don't brag about being humble, and proud people don't brag about being humble either!

I realize that I'm intertwining issues with money and time. But I think the two are so interwoven in our minds. As Satan has convinced us, time is something that can be turned into money with a little work and a tiny bit of cheating or deceiving (or lawsuits or whining

and begging). And that money is something that can be turned into monthly payments to get stuff. And stuff allows us to brag about what we have and to take great pleasure in this world. And Satan wins another soul.

Jesus' call concerning time is as shockingly different as his call concerning money. He urges us to not get caught up in useless debates and quarrels, but to invest our time in the lives and well-being of others. He commands us to make disciples — something that demands YEARS of our time — not simply to, "Tell others about Jesus" — which takes only moments. He tells us to train up our children, to always abide (be immersed) in the Word of God, never letting it drift away from our conversation or thoughts. He tells us to chase after righteousness, and to abandon this life, and to teach and encourage one another while it is still Today. Jesus warns us that life is just a fleeting vapor that's here one moment and gone the next, so we must take every advantage of every moment, lest it be lost forever.

Satan's message is all over the world. Enjoy your life! You're going to heaven someday, and you can worry about doing what's right then. And God will give you everything you want! And anyone who tells you to give more time than your Sunday morning is legalistic. Don't listen to him! Devote your life to pleasure, because pleasure is all you have! Consider yourself lucky to have such pleasures! Rack up as many things to brag about as you possibly can! He who has the most toys wins! He who has less than his neighbor is a loser!

Which of these lines do you live by? Do you chase after pleasure because you know life is short? Or do you invest every spare moment into others, knowing that your life is eternal? If we are going to have any effect on the Kingdom of God, we absolutely must break

away from the world's mindset. We must be renewed by the Word of God and encouraged daily by the Body of Christ. We must forsake those time-stealing activities that don't profit the Kingdom, whether they're evil or just unprofitable. We must lay our lives down for Jesus if we are ever to really live.

Satan Exposed: Our Talents

There are dozens of ways Satan can steal our talent from us. He could convince us that we really have no talent, or that there are others that are far better at something than we are. He could tell us that only certain talents are useful for the Lord's service, or get us involved in using our talents for our own gain. There are a couple of categories into which these lies fall, though: Satan convinces us that we are inadequate, leading to self-defeat and a feeling of inferiority, or he convinces us that we're very good at something, leading to pride and a feeling of superiority. Either way, he distracts us from the Kingdom and draws us back into his world.

Inferiority

There are many faces to this lie. On one end, we can believe that we're not good at anything at all, and we simply float through life, waiting for Heaven to show up and whisk us away to a different life. On the other end, we could believe that we're great at everything until it comes to something that God really wants us to use for His service. We also don't help matters because as red-blooded Americans, we've been taught from birth to compare ourselves to those around us. Even if I'm a decent singer, I'm not as good as Joe, so I'd only embarrass myself.

Another huge problem in the Church today is in which talents we deem appropriate for church use and which are just plain, ordinary skills. For instance, Satan has convinced us that singing, speaking in front of people, sitting on a board of deacons, and teaching Sunday school, are the only services that can be used in a "churchly" manner. The irony here is that

none of these tasks meet the needs of those around us! What the world really needs is someone who can cook meals, donate food, provide hospitality to the homeless, do laundry for the single mother, round up clothes for the struggling family, pay the bills when the ends don't meet, etc. As long as Satan can keep us convinced that singing every fourth Sunday in the worship team is the highest honor among men, we're content to do just that.

Then inferiority comes back to haunt us again. Maybe we start to believe we *could* cook a meal for a family. But our meal wouldn't have three courses and a wonderful dessert and make Emeril jealous. So we give up and look for another idea. Or, our house isn't really big enough to house another person, so we don't even extend the invitation. If we can't pay a \$600 shut-off notice for the single parent down the street, we never think twice about paying \$100 toward the bill and rounding up a few other families to do the same. After all, who am I, a single person among six billion, to go after all of the world's problems?

Superiority

The other side of the coin is those people who make the inferior feel so low. Some do it intentionally, most probably are so caught up in their own greatness that they don't realize they're squashing the hopes and dreams of countless others. These are the people who, no matter what you say, have always done it bigger and faster, went through agonizing torture to get there, made unbelievable sacrifice, but always for the glory of God (sarcasm intended). Again, the undertones aren't always intentional, but the young and aspiring person knows exactly how it feels when his best efforts are trumped by a well-meaning bragger.

So how do these issues tie in with Time and Treasure? Just as Satan keeps our time and treasure invested in useless pride and materials here on this planet, he leads us to focus

our efforts on talents that only serve the here and now. If we're able to do something that would build the Kingdom or serve someone with need, he tells us we're not good enough to meet that need. Or he keeps our eyes focused on another talent, always telling us how great we are at it. Either way, he keeps us from doing what needs to be done.

Jesus' solution to the world's problems, whether we like it or not, is His Church. He has commissioned us to be salt and light, to reach out and save the dying world around us. He has given us talents, boat-loads of talents, and sent us out to use them. But we've again bought lies. We think the highest skills on earth are football and figure skating. We worship those whose talent is "sport". We pour our money and time at their altars and worship at their feet. But the talent we should be pruning, in us, in our Church, in our children, are those that meet the needs of people around us. We give of our time, our treasure, and our talent, sacrificing our very lives, so that those we meet never go without the things they need. And then we turn around and encourage one another daily to do what is good and right and pure, making the most of our time because the days are evil.

Satan Exposed: Our Testimony

The last part of our life that Satan steals from us is our testimony. He has lured away our time and our treasure, rooting them deeply in this world and its pleasures. He has convinced us that useless talents are to be worshiped and useful talents are silly and inferior. So how does he get our testimony?

First, consider what a testimony is. It's our account concerning God's work as we have witnessed and experienced it. The reason our testimony has been stolen is that when we're not serving God, we're not giving to those around us, when we're not investing in other lives and making disciples, we haven't witnessed anything to share or experienced God's work in our midst!

In the modern American church, a testimony is a 30-second "How I 'got saved'" blurb. Everyone claps and ushers you into the elite "church membership" club, and life goes on. But even among seasoned believers, there's very little talk about week-to-week service, healing, redemption, etc. We have no new stories about what God's doing, and we grow sick and tired of the same stories over and over again, so we move on to talk about what everyone else talks about — sports and politics (or whatever other topic comes up).

Our testimony will return with power and excitement just as soon as we get out and serve those around us with our time and talent and treasure. When we come together as a single Church and decide to do something about the rapidly decaying world around us, then God will do great things among us and we'll have the excitement to shout it from the rooftops!

Sadly, though, we're neck-deep in the web of Satan's dominion and we can't even

imagine that escape is possible. We're so far removed from encouragement and excitement, we'd rather just curl up and die and hope that God will revive us in time for the whole Heaven era. But we're missing a very important fact: The Kingdom is here. Jesus established it and left us here to open the door to those around us! The power over sin and death is made available to all who believe, and we've been commissioned to loose the bonds and break the yokes of our dying neighbors!

Let us repent and seek after God. Let us give gladly our offerings! Let us give our time — all of our waking moments — to His Kingdom and His image-bearers; let us give our talents in any way imaginable to meet the needs around us; let us give our treasure to any and all who ask of us; then let us share with trumpets our testimony of what God is doing and has done.