

“Together in Possessions”- Malachi 3:10, Luke 12: 22-34, John 17:20, 21,
Acts 2:43-45

Today you cannot pick up the newspaper, watch TV, WTOP radio, or receive infomercials on your computer or phone that don't give you an opportunity to invest in the future. Those who do this for a living suggest all kinds of investments for their clients. Such things invested in are treasury notes, mutual funds, stocks, and silver and gold. In the world of investment today one is taking ones money now and investing in the future in order that their material wealth will grow through interest for a good retirement.

Over the past two weeks we have been looking at five characteristics of the early church that brought unity and made the church very successful in its ministry. Jesus, in his prayer in John 17 that we have looked at each week, prays that God's people will be one in unity. Two weeks ago we looked at unity through prayer. Last week we looked at unity through presence. This morning I invite us to look at the third area that brought the early church together and that is possessions.

In Acts 2 we discover that the early church was involved in an investment program of sorts. We read in verses 44-45, “And those who had believed were together and had all things in common. This is very strong unity, but they began to sell their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.” So what kind of investing was the early church doing and why was that significant?

There was first of all the investment of responsibility. The early church, like the church of today, had both rich people in it and poor people. The people of the early church felt a deep responsibility because of their love for Jesus and people felt the need to make sure that those who had so little were taken care of by those who had so much. The early church shared their possessions with those in need. Spirit-filled and Christ-filled people coming together and as a result of their unity, their oneness were sharing with those in need.

The second investment the early church was far more reaching. The early church invested their possessions because they had an investment of vision. They had a vision that the whole world would know the marvelous good news of Jesus Christ through their generous giving. In order for that to happen they felt the need to give away their possessions so that those both inside the church, but also those outside the church would experience extreme generosity and that they would want to come and be a part of this new Christian fellowship.

Jesus spent an inordinate amount of time in his teaching on wise investing. In fact Jesus spent more time in his teaching of our possessions than he did on any other subject. This was not Jesus' subtle way of saying we have to support his ministry with our donations. Nor was it a way to turn people off to Christianity and faith because he talked about money, but like the early church did, Jesus saw the giving of possessions as an investment. In our story in Luke 12, we find Jesus talking about trust. We are invited to trust God for all of our needs. How we struggle to believe that God has our best material interests at heart. God wants us to have a vision that goes beyond worrying about our material possessions and money. Jesus invited his listeners and us to take stock of our finances. "Sell your possessions and give it to charity; make yourselves a purse that does not ear out, find the unfailing treasure that is in heaven that will unlike money and possessions not run out. Invest in that which will not be stolen or can break and wear out."

Most of us know the name Martin Luther. He was the German reformer of the sixteenth century who understood well these words of Jesus. Luther understood Jesus to say, "I have held many things in my hands and have lost them all, but whatever I place in God's hands, that I still possess." He went on to write, "There are three conversions necessary for the Christian life: the conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind, and the conversion of the purse." The hardest one for us to do is the last one: the conversion of the purse. Yet once one is converted in his giving it becomes a source of blessing to the giver and to those one gives to.

Jesus is telling us something extremely important about our possessions. Jesus talks about an investment that each one of us can make. It is an investment that is not in danger of depreciating like stocks. It is an investment that we cannot lose. It is an investment that cannot be taken away from us. It is an investment that provides true security. As Martin Luther said so well 500 years ago anything given back to God we have no danger of losing. It is an investment that results from a spirit of thanksgiving for what God has done in people's lives. It is an investment in heaven where nothing fails.

George White lived in a rented room at the YMCA. He had one set of clothes, shoes wrapped in rubber bands to keep his shoes from flopping when he walked. He owned a threadbare black overcoat. Two local police officers took an interest in ole George and started slipping a few bucks from time to time. They discovered that a guy named Billy the Greek over at the local grill gave him a hot breakfast every morning at no charge.

When Christmas came around the two police officers and their families decided to have George as their guest for Christmas dinner and presents. When he received his presents he unwrapped them carefully. Later as they drove him back over to the "Y" George asked, "Are these presents really for me to keep?" They assured him that they were." Then we must stop at the grill before you take me home." With that George started to rewrap the presents. When they walked into the grill, Billy the Greek was there as always. George goes up to him and says to Billy, "You have always been good to me. Now I want to be good to you in this season of Christmas." George gave Billy all of his gifts on the spot.

George discovered the importance of investment that cannot be lost. George who really had next to nothing in worldly possessions He discovered that joys and blessings did not come in the receiving of gifts as it did by turning around and giving gifts. This man of little means was extremely rich. He discovered that what you place in God's hands you still own.

I love the verse in Malachi who offers a very serious challenge to those who still doubt God's goodness. God uses the prophet Malachi to put out the challenge to test God and see as we give back like George how much that God will

open up the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you won't have room for it all.

A strong church is one who is unified in prayers for one another and for those outside the church and faith. A strong church is one who has a strong presence in the community where people know and experience the love of Jesus through them. A strong church is one that is strong in giving away possessions and material things in order that others may have quality of life.