

You are being tested. Did you realize that? Sometimes psychologists will put a child into a room. They will surround the child with playmates, give the child toys, and then stand behind the two-way-mirror and watch. The psychologists will stand there with their lab coats on, their clipboards, and watch. How will that child act? What will he do with those toys? How will he treat his playmates? That child has no idea that he is being tested. The same is true for you. God has placed you into this world. He surrounds you with people. And instead of giving you toys, God gives you money. And then God stands back and watches you. How will you act, God asks himself. What will you do with that money that I've given to you? How will you treat those people I've surrounded you with?

Do you realize that you are being tested, every time you receive a paycheck? God is watching you, looking into your mind to see how much you love the money that you are receiving. He watches your spending habits, to see if you're spend all your money on yourself, or if you're generous toward others. He looks at your budget, to see if you're worldly, or if you're spiritual, in the way that you use your money. God says to himself, "I've given that person health, certain skills, and the opportunity to make money. Now how will he, or she, use it?" Do you realize that God is testing you, examining your attitudes, your motives, your choices, every time you receive a paycheck?

In some ways, it's intimidating, isn't it? What is Jesus looking for from me? Obviously, he wants me to be shrewd. In other words, to use my money wisely, being a good manager. In addition, he wants me to "Use Worldly Wealth To Gain Eternal Friends!"

In our Gospel lesson for this morning, Jesus taught his disciples about money. He told them the story of a man who was fired from his job. He was a manager of financial accounts for a rich man, and he was about to be thrown out onto the street. So what does he do? He decides that he's going to make some friends before he loses his job. He calls in one person who owes his master some money, and says to him, "Here's what I'm going to do for you. I'm going to cut your bill in half." He calls in another person who owes his master money, and says to him, "Here's what I'm going to do for you – I'm going to cut your bill by 20 percent." He was hoping that these people would someday welcome him and help him after he lost his job.

When his master found out what he was doing, he commended the dishonest manager, Jesus tells us, because he was being so shrewd and clever when it came to money. And then, Jesus gives the main point of this story in verse 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." Use the money you have right now with the future in mind. Make friends for yourself that will someday welcome you into heaven. Don't just spend your money on yourself – use it to benefit other people. And don't just spend your money on earthly things. Use your money for spiritual purposes, to benefit people in a spiritual way, so that when you go to heaven, there will be people there who will welcome you.

Isn't there a certain part of us that balks at this idea? "Spending my money on other people, to gain eternal friends? I don't think so." A certain part of us doesn't like that, and that part of us is our sinful nature. Our sinful nature loves money. It says, You need to make more, you still don't have enough. It says, "You need to keep what you have, you can't give it away, you may live to 100 and need it. It says, You feel much better if you spend money on yourself". We all have a part of us that is self-centered. A part of us that wants to keep as much as possible for ourselves. This morning, Jesus points out our sin – the sin of greed and self-centeredness, the sin of worshiping money instead of glorifying God.

What we sometimes forget, with our handling of our finances, we haven't always been good at it. We have purchased things we really don't need. We have made some bad investment decisions. We are not always the best of managers. God has every right to lock us up in a debtors' prison. That's something we don't have to worry about in our country today. But there was a time, in England for example, when, if you couldn't pay your bills, you would be sent to debtors' prison. You and your family would be taken away, and placed into a run-down bungalow, with all kinds of prisoners, and there you would work to pay off your debt, all day, every day. The Bible describes every human being as someone who is locked up in a debtor's prison. Imagine the poorest country in the world. What country is that? Afghanistan? Everyone is dirt poor. No one has anything. That's how God's Word describes our entire world, spiritually. We're all, so far in debt, that we'll never be able to work our way out. Eternally poor.

But that's when Jesus enters the picture, isn't it. He's like the manager in our story, only better. He doesn't just cancel half our debt. He does something bigger. He gives you and me the biggest donation ever given in the history of our world – a donation that was given directly to you. He gives away his position on the throne of God. He comes down to this earth, and gives away all his good works, all his righteousness. He gives away everything in his spiritual bank account – and he gives it all to you. And then, in addition to that, he takes our debt, and puts that into his account. Just imagine, if the richest man in the world were to say to you, here take all of my money – every last penny. And I'll take on all your debt. Every bill you have – your mortgage, your car payment, your credit card bills – all your debt, I'll take it on. And you can have all that I own. Imagine that! What a donation!

That is exactly what Jesus has done for you. He takes your debt of sin. And he gives you all his righteousness, worth more than all the money in the world. This transaction took place on the cross. And God the Father accepted this transaction – that's why Jesus rose from the dead – to prove to you that this has really happened – the greatest donation ever. This changes the way we look at money. It's no longer something we want to worship. Instead, we see it differently, as a gift God gives us, to use to glorify Christ. And today, Jesus gives us a specific example of how we can use our money to glorify him. Verse 9 – to use our money to gain eternal friends. It is good to give to causes. To give to help the poor, to help those who need it. It's good to give to an earthly cause. But of all the causes in the world, there is no greater cause than getting someone into heaven. That's why you're here.

God is testing you, to see how you will be with your money. In verses 10-12, Jesus tells us that God is watching you, to see if you can be trusted. In verse 11: “If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” In other words, the riches of heaven – “how can I give you heaven, God says, if I can’t even trust you with money? And then verse 13: “No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.” Are you trying to love God, and love Money? You can’t love both, Jesus says. If you love money, that will eventually kill your love for God.

Marvin Schwan is a name you might recognize – owner of Schwan’s ice cream, Schwan’s fine foods. Those yellow armored trucks with food in the back. Marvin Schwan has since passed away. He was a Lutheran, and he gave literally millions of dollars to the world missions of the Wisconsin Synod.. Why? Not because he was pressured. And not because he was trying to earn his way to heaven. He wanted to worship Christ, show his love for Jesus, and so he used his worldly wealth to gain eternal friends. Jesus encourages us to do the same. It doesn’t matter how much you have. What matters is how you use it. What can I do with my money, during this short time I am on this earth, to gain eternal friends? Why can I do, to help someone else find out about the greatest donation ever made?

Many years ago a certain woman was preparing a box to be sent to some missionaries in India. A child gave her a penny, which she used to purchase a tract for the box. Eventually, this tract reached a Burmese chief and was used to lead him to saving faith in Christ. That chief told the story of his conversion to his friends, many of whom believed. Eventually, a church was established there, and over 1500 natives were converted to Christianity. No gift is too small for God to use. someday, that little child will be welcomed into eternal life by over 1500 people from India.

Oneday soon God is going to welcome you and me into his heaven. People will be there, people you have helped during your lifetime. People that were in trouble, and you made sacrifices to help them. People will be there that needed Christ in their lives, and you made financial sacrifices so that the Word of God could be shared with them. These people will someday cheer at the tops of their voices when they see you escorted into heaven.

Isn’t that good news? God has forgiven you for all the mistakes you have made in your life. And there is a group of people in heaven that just can’t wait to welcome you. This affects the way we live our lives right now, doesn’t it. God is testing me. So I will use my time on this earth for his purposes, and not just for mine. That paycheck is God’s gift to me. I’ll fulfill my obligations - I’ll pay my bills. But I’ll also look for ways to use that paycheck to help others – that’s God’s purpose. I’ll also use that paycheck to support the ministry of the Word – that’s God’s purpose. I do that, not because I have to, but because I want to – I’m preparing for the future. I’m looking forward to that day when I will be welcomed into heaven by all my eternal

friends. I can't wait to see you there. May God bless you with faith in Christ, and with a spiritual approach to the money he has given to you. Amen.