

Luke 12:15-21 11/3/13 (Red Letters #8) **LETTERS OF STEWARDSHIP**

I'm not a betting man, but if I was, I'd bet that some of you are already squirming. You've heard the readings, you see the title: "Letters of Stewardship." If you're a church person, you're reasonably sure that somewhere in the middle of Stewardship is money. And you're pretty sure you don't want to come to church to hear a sermon on money. Well folks, before we go any further, I just want to make you a promise. I solemnly promise that I will not offer you any challenge this morning that Jesus doesn't offer. In fact, I promise that - throughout this whole series on the **Red Letters** of Jesus. That's kind of the point of what we've been doing together with this series, getting to know the Jesus who really lived, died and rose again for us. People speculate about "What Would Jesus Do"

Slide: WWJD bracelet

And everybody likes to get Jesus on their side, so to speak, for their pet cause. But folks, how do you know what Jesus would do unless you know what Jesus **did**,

Slide: WDJD

and what He **said**?

Slide: WDJS

And so far in this series, where we've been wearing the WDJS bracelet, learning "What did Jesus Say", we have seen Jesus get bigger and bigger and bigger. Jesus is more uncompromising and more forgiving, He's more committed to the Truth, more welcoming, more confrontational, more relational, more in your face... He's more of everything than the images we've created of Him. So we shouldn't be surprised that the same is true when it comes to Jesus and the concept of Stewardship.

We know of course that a "steward" is someone who takes care of the owner's possessions, whether that's an estate or a farm or whatever. He's not the owner, he's the steward of someone **else's** stuff. Now, in the interest of full disclosure, Jesus doesn't use the word "stewardship." The concept is there in these Red Letters, but Jesus is much more cut and dried. He uses the terms "master" and "servant". And desperately tries to get us to understand that we really don't own anything; that **God** is the maker and owner of heaven and earth; and that He is pleased to entrust us with time, talents, treasure and testimony for a short 70 or 80 years. And He expects us to do something with everything He loans to us in that time.

In the first reading, Jesus starts out slamming the Pharisees about fasting, which He also did in last week's **Red Letters**. It's not that Jesus was against fasting, He said: "**When you fast...**" which implies that He actually expected them to do that as part of their spiritual growth. But what he was definitely against, was making it about yourself. And of course, that's what the Pharisees were ALL about. They were **very** religious and they wanted everybody to know it and to see it and to pat them on the back for it. Earlier Jesus had prefaced this whole discussion with the statement:

Slide: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1 NIV)

So really in this first reading we learn that

1. True Stewardship is about you and God. It's not about you and the church. It's not about you and the budget. It's not about you and other people. It's about you and God. And it's about who God really is to you. That's why Jesus is so willing to talk to you directly about

money, because your attitude toward **money** tends to reveal the truth about **you**, and if you're willing to see it, it will reveal the truth **to** you. So Jesus said in very direct **Red Letters**:

Slide: “**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**” (Mathew 6:21 NIV)

In other words, where you put the money entrusted to you, is going to tell you what you love. Pretty simple. If you love God, you'll use money for Him and to advance His cause, making disciples for Christ. If you don't love God, you won't give money to that cause. Then He said even more directly:

Slide: “**No one 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.**” (Matthew 6:24 NIV)

Folks, I know that people do think about serving **God**, but do you ever really think about the ways that you serve **money**? When you have money, what do you have to do with it? You have to protect it, research where to put it, invest it, worry about it, give it to the government, try to buy health insurance with it. And so with all the attention you have to give to it, it can easily become your master. It doesn't serve you, you serve it.

Slide: FFL bowing down to money pic

The same thing can of course happen with the **stuff** you buy with money. Remember this old Travelers commercial? I think speaks perfectly to what Jesus is trying to tell us here:

Slide: Travelers Ins. Worry commercial with dog

Just as a dog worries about his bone, so we worry about the things we think we own. And folks, no insurance company can truly take that worry away from you. But God can. As the Psalmist said:

Slide: “Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty... He will shield you with his wings. He will shelter you with his feathers. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.” (Psalm 91:1, 4)

Only in the shelter of God can you find true rest for your soul, because only God cares about you enough to send His Son into this world for you. He didn't just give you **Red Letters**. He gave you the **Red** of His **Blood**, shed to pay the price for all your debts, all that you owe God and should have done for Him and all that you've ever done wrong. Jesus died for it and for you. And rose triumphant that you may truly rest in Him.

It's only when you realize that you have a master who cares for you that deeply, it's only when you decide to serve that master with everything you have and everything you are; it's only when you make your life about God and you fill your life with Him that your worries will really start to go away.

In the second reading, Jesus' **Red Letters** talk to us more about that life, that

2. Stewardship is about making your life count.

The parable that Jesus tells is typically bigger than the image we have of it. There can be a play on words here in English on the word “Talent.” And so we often go there, talking about burying our talents, our abilities, by not using them for God as we should. But in the original, a “talent” is a measure of money, a weight. In this case it is 75 pounds of gold. I believe gold is around \$1,300 an ounce right now, so that would be \$20,800 a pound. So in today's terms, one talent would be \$1,560,000, and five talents \$7,800,000! This is a serious stash of cash Jesus is talking about. And of course we know that in the parable, two servants doubled their master's

money, and one hid it in the ground. And it's kind of shocking to see how hard the master is on that servant, which is to say, how hard Jesus is on someone with that attitude:

Slide: "...throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30 NIV)

Wow, "worthless"! Did your image of Jesus have Him saying something like that? I'd guess not. But folks, what is your life if you don't do anything with it? If you decide only to use it for you? The fact is that everything that we think of as "ours" is really "His", and whether it's time, talent, treasure or testimony, **God does not want us hiding what is His**. It's the same way with the **Red Letters** of Jesus that we're walking through in this series. Folks, God doesn't want this just to be an intellectual exercise that leaves us more or less the same as when we started. Jesus wants His Word to change us. And He wants us to do something with it. It's very clear in the Bible that we are saved by faith in Jesus alone. But it is also clear that true faith is never alone. It always bears fruit. For us to sit on our Bibles is criminal. In the last analysis, what we do with the Word of God really reveals whether or not it has penetrated into our hearts and souls and born the fruit of faith. And so He not only calls this servant "worthless" but "wicked", and "lazy".

Atheist Penn Jillette understands this aspect. I've shown this clip from one of his video blogs before. I'll just use a part of it for you today:

Slide: Penn Jillette clip

Folks, that is just such a powerful statement, and such a powerful indictment against "worthless" stewards who think they're doing God a favor by worshipping Him on Sunday, but going into the "secret service" of God's army on Monday.

Then finally we get to the last reading this morning where we learn that

3. Stewardship is about having an eternal perspective.

Which is, of course, the exact opposite of what we learn in the world. Jesus says to us:

Slide: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15 NIV)

But that's not the message we learn from the world, is it?

Slide: Customer is king clip

"The customer is king." I am king. Folks, every one of us has been immersed in that culture and that message – which may help our economy, but it sure doesn't help you. It doesn't help you to be the person God intended you to be. And it doesn't help you figure out what life is really all about... not your temporary possessions, but your eternity.

Martin Luther said, "I have held many things in my hands and have lost them all...but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." When you realize that you are only God's steward and not the master of your time, talent, treasure and testimony, you are free to place it all in your Lord's hands. And Jesus was not afraid to challenge us to do just that. He wants us to make an investment that is not subject to recessions or depressions, an investment that provides true security; an investment in Him and in His work.

Folks, I hope you'll take our invitation to the **Red Letter** Dinners next week (Sunday, Monday or Tuesday night) where we can eat together, fellowship together and talk more about how we can make that eternal investment together, and answer Jesus' **Red Letters** of Stewardship, Discipleship and Mission.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Red Letters that challenge us, that ask us to get real about our Relationship to You, that give us an opportunity to make our lives count and that remind us to come at life with an eternal perspective. We're sorry about where we've fallen short. Please forgive us. And help us to stop pretending and dabbling in our faith and stewardship and truly surrender to You as Lord. Amen.