

Money Is Power

A Willingness to Share

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Given 11-Oct-03; Tape #FT03-03

If you have been in the church of God for any period of time, you probably have heard a sermon at the Feast, or just before in which the minister mentions that we have approximately ten percent of our annual income to spend during these eight days of the Feast. That is a lot of money, if you think about it! It might not seem like very much once you get here and you think about all the things that you have to spend that money upon, but still it is a sizable chunk of cash that we have to spend in these (only) eight days out of the year!

(I am considering that we might spend a little bit during the year on any of the other holy days, that is why I said approximately ten percent of our annual income is in our pockets here at the Feast.)

It is also likely that whoever gave that sermon also said that God is watching how we spend our money, because how a person spends his money tells an awful lot about him.

That is my theme today as well. I would like to speak about a similar thing, but with a twist. It is tied to the phrase "money is power."

That, by the way, is the title that I chose for this sermon today.

I propose that how we spend our money at the Feast, in particular, can give God a fair estimate of how we will handle the power that He will give us in the millennium. I think that money is a pretty fair way to measure that sort of thing. He is not going to give us this power without having seen how we do with other things. We will see that a little later.

Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything.

From time immemorial money has been power. If you have money as a man, it seems that you can do almost anything. Without it a person can almost do nothing. He is poor; he is powerless.

A person with money, however, finds doors open to him everywhere and for everything. Sure, he can buy the best of everything, but beyond that, his money makes contacts for him. It makes positions for him. It makes prestige available to him, and favors too. These things just happen to come to people who have money.

A man with wealth rubs elbows with movers and shakers. If he is not already, he will be likely invited to join the club and begin influencing others. He will begin making far reaching decisions. Pretty soon, if he maintains his wealth, he becomes a force to be reckoned with.

This may seem to be an extreme example, but take Bill Gates. It was not too long ago that Bill Gates, the present chairman of Microsoft Corporation, was a geeky computer nerd trying to get

anyone with a little bit of money to listen to him and his ideas about a simple but workable operating system. (And since then, he has been trying to convince all of us that it is simple, and that it works!)

However, this man has taken this idea of an operating system for personal computers, and made more than a fortune.

In mid-September (a month ago) Forbes Magazine ranked him as the richest man in the United States for the tenth year in a row. His net worth is now 46 billion dollars.

Of course, it can go up a hundred million dollars, or down a hundred million in a day, just depending on how Microsoft stock is trading that day. I think he might have about 12 million shares of Microsoft stock. If that stock goes down a penny, well, do the math. 1.2 million dollars he loses just like that.

But, of course, what is that to him? We will see here in just a moment.

This next section I got off of the computer. It is called the Bill Gates Wealth Index if you want to go check it out yourself. I will quote from this extensively.

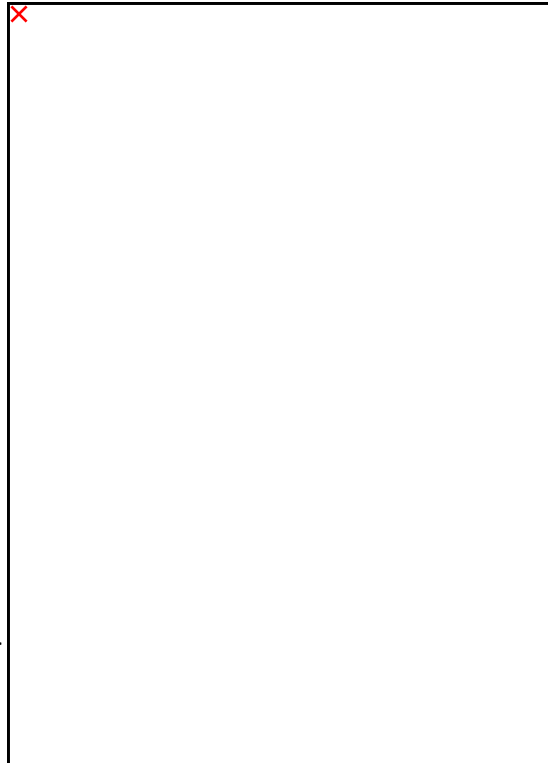
Most people will have read the recent reports of how Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates has had his personal net worth soar over 100 billion dollars and then drop down to 55 billion. He certainly knows how to make (and lose) money.

Consider that he made this money in the 25 years or so since Microsoft was founded in 1975. If you presume that he has worked 14 hours a day on every business day of the year since then, that means he's been making money at a staggering million dollars per hour, around \$300 per second.

Which means that if, on his way into the office, should he see or drop a \$1000 bill on the ground, it's just not worth his time to bend over and pick it up. He would make more just heading off to work.

If it's a pile of cash he has to count, it's even worse. At \$3,700 per second in 98, they would have to be mythical five-thousand-dollar Bills?and he would need to have a quick hand?to avoid him losing the money in wasted time while he's counting them. Counting \$1,000 bills would be very unprofitable.

(So, as this says, he would have to be counting mythical \$5000 bills [because the U.S. Treasury



does not print them] to make it worth his time.)

He had mentioned earlier that he had made 45 billion dollars in twelve months in 1998.

That \$45B in 12 months is an astounding rate at which to make money. That's higher than the entire gross domestic products of Chile and Egypt, and he's done twice as well as Guatemala, 4 times better than all of Sri Lanka or the Dominican Republic, 6 times better than Costa Rica, El Salvador or Panama, 8 times better than everybody in Brunei, including the Sultan, and 23 times better than all of Bermuda. That's right, in 1998 Bill's made much more (before taxes) than the entire population of Kuwait, all the Emirs, oil wells, Sheiks, millionaires and peasants?everybody.

And forget about companies. Nobody?even G.M, Exxon, Ford, IBM and Intel *combined*?has earned what Bill's did in 98 by holding onto that MSFT stock. His profit/month is more than all the sales of Lockheed Martin, J.C. Penny, UPS or Intel, and all but 25 of the largest companies on last year's Fortune 500. In fact, in 1998, his stock has gone up around three times Microsoft's entire sales?not just profits?for 1996.

Another way to examine this sort of wealth is to compare it to yours. (It is very humbling, believe me!) Consider an average American of modest wealth. Perhaps she has a net worth of \$70,000. (This is net worth, not salary.) Mr. Gates' worth is 800,000 times larger. Which means that if something costs \$100,000 to her (of moderate wealth), to Bill it's as though it costs 12 cents.

So for example, you might think a new Lamborghini Diablo would cost \$250,000 (of your hard earned pennies), but in Bill Gates dollars that's 31 cents 31 cents.

That fully loaded, multimedia active matrix 233 MHZ laptop with the 1024x768 screen you've been drooling after? Half a penny.

A nice home in a rich town like Palo Alto, California? Two dollars. That nice mansion he's building? A more reasonable \$63 to him.

You might spend \$50 on tickets, food and parking to take your date to see an NHL hockey game. Bill, on the other hand could buy *the team* for 50 Bill-bills.

You might buy a plane ticket on a Boeing 747 for \$1200 at full-fare coach. In Bill-bills, Mr. Gates could buy six 747s (Not tickets, the planes themselves). Two for him, two for Melinda and two for young Jennifer Katherine. (I guess they need that much to carry their stuff!)

Bill could buy every single major league team in Baseball, Football, Basketball and Hockey for only about 35% of his net worth?plenty left

over to buy a European sport.

Of course then he wouldn't have around \$150 for every person in the USA as he does now. Nor could he still give \$6.70 to every person on the planet.

Marcus suggests that Bill could pay Michael Jordan's 1997 salary only 1300 times, but that he could buy 902 million subscriptions to TV guide.

Now we will see how much all this money would be if it were put into dollar bills:

Laid end to end, the Bills (Bill-bills) would stretch 3.8 million miles to the moon and back over 8 times. They could paper over all of Manhattan 7 times, or be stacked 2,690 miles high?watch out for satellites. They would weigh 40,000 tons?100 times the weight of one of those 747s he bought above.

But one thing Marcus says Bill can't do is even dent the national debt. Should he selflessly donate his stock to the U.S. treasury, he would reduce the \$5.37 trillion national debt by well under 1%. It's nice to put things in perspective.

This author finishes his article by saying,

Hey, Bill, if you just spent 3 minutes reading this article, do you realize you could have made \$50,000 in that time? Back to work.

So, Bill Gates, if he really wanted to, could buy just about anything that this world has to offer. And, because of his wealth, people listen to him when he speaks. It does not even have to be on computers. If he happens to speak about the United Nations or something that they are doing, people will turn up their television sets and listen, because he has money. Money means influence, and influence means power.

On the other hand, there is a down side to all this wealth. People with wealth often forget its value. Believe it or not, many wealthy people, at least people we would consider wealthy, spend well beyond their means. In a recent consumer opinion poll showed that 58.9% of people with incomes over \$100,000 are in debt. That is nearly 2/3rds of these people are in debt. Of course, not just the wealthy are in debt by any means. Half of over 3100 respondents, regardless of their income, reported regularly breaking their monthly budgets.

If we were to look at credit card debt averages of American homes that is not hard to imagine. People have that plastic in their pockets, and they think that it just does not run out. They may know that they have a \$20,000 limit, but what is that to them? It is all just little digits in a computer.

So, they over spend, and do not even think about their budgets. They just spend. This says

very little for our ability to handle power.

The question is for us, "How well do we handle money?"

How well do we handle money when it is God's money that He has allowed us to use at the Feast? How well do we handle money at home? That is the question for today.

Luke 19 is the parable of the minas. This parable lends credence to my proposition that the way that we handle money shows how well we will handle power.

Luke 19:11-27 Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us. And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas. And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' ("But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me."

First, we need to understand what a mina is. A mina is 60 shekels, a unit of currency equal to about 3 months salary. Ten minas, then, would be roughly 2 ½ times a persons yearly salary. So, for a person making \$50,000 a year, this would be equivalent to \$125,000.

It was a considerable amount of money.

And, this is what he split among his ten servants. They each received "seed" money of about \$12,500 to work with. Like I said earlier, it was not an inconsiderable amount of money; it was quite good. This is what they were to have to start their project to impress the boss.

When the nobleman returned He sought to know how much every man had gained by trading. In the spiritual analogy doing business or trading are equivalent to living God's way of life, overcoming, growing, and (in the sense of a minister) doing the work. If you are not a minister you still have your place in contributing to doing the work.

These servants, His people, were given a basic amount on which to build, as we heard this morning, a foundation upon which to build. As we see, there is great potential in that foundation.

One took it to the next power. He did ten times what he had gotten, so by the time that Christ returned, he was able to show him a \$125,000 worth of growth, work, business. He had taken his Master's mina and made a whole new ten minas. That is pretty good profit.

Another one was able to do half that. And although it was only half of his brother servant's amount, Christ certainly applauded him for his work and diligence.

But notice that the rewards that they got for their trading translated their abilities in handling money into equivalent positions of power and authority. During their lifetimes (in the parable) they had to work with money. But, their reward was management, if you will, positions of power and authority. In this case, it was political authority over cities, over regions, over large groups of people.

The servant who did nothing with his money, however, received no reward—none at all! In fact, what he had been given, and kept in his zero-interest savings account—probably the handkerchief was under his mattress—he got nothing. In fact, he got it taken away! It was given to the one who had earned more!

That is why these people in verse 25 are saying, "*Master! This guy has so much! Why are you giving it to him?*"

His answer is, "*If you produce, you are going to be given more! But, if you do not produce, even what you have will be taken away!*"

In fact, this one who received no reward, if you look at the equivalent in the parable of the Talents, the unprofitable servant is cast into outer darkness! It is not just that he does not get a reward, but he gets the second death, the lake of fire, because he failed to produce.

Jesus does not give us an example of a servant who lost his shirt with His money. You would have to assume, of course, that that person would not also be in the Kingdom. Something to think about.

This section, in Luke 16, is the moral of the parable of the unjust steward.

Luke 16:10-12 He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? And if you have not been

faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

The parable itself of the unjust steward, dealt with dealing shrewdly in money matters. Here was a man who was about to get fired from his job, and he makes deals with these other people who owed his master money, so that even though he was going to get canned, he might find work elsewhere.

Jesus commended him because he had dealt so shrewdly with the situation. But, His teaching?the moral of the story?dwells not on money, or other financial matters, or dealing shrewdly with other people, but on faithfulness, justice, and responsibility in God?s kingdom. If you notice here in verse 9 (which I did not read) He begins with talking about everlasting habitations. His mind is obviously not necessarily on the now, but on how what we do now will play out in the future when we come into the kingdom of God.

Jesus was always thinking about the kingdom of God. When He came into Galilee, that is what He preached, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. And, all these things that He teaches keeps coming back to that. Our whole life looks forward to those everlasting habitations.

We always have to take these principles to the point where we understand how they are going to impact us and others in God?s kingdom. They are not just for now, but they are also for ever.

All of these things He talks about are aspects of power and authority?faithfulness. A leader has to be faithful to those who he leads. And, vice versa. It is part of leadership. It is one of the foundational principles of His power and authority.

Justice is also one of those things that leaders?those who have power?have to use and administer, as well as, responsibility. They have to be able to use their power and authority responsibly.

It is just common sense. What about a person who has a track record or habitual practice of turning lemonade back into lemons?which is the wrong direction? They cannot seem to hold onto a good situation. God blesses them time and time again, but it all falls apart.

They end up in debt again, when they had been given the amount of money it takes to get out of debt. Suddenly they are in the clear, and they are set to begin building again, but, before you know it, they are back in debt again. And, they are wanting to be bailed out again. If they have this sort of track record, who is going to trust him with something really important, like judging or teaching? Or, as we saw in the last parable, administering a city or five cities or ten cities?

Someone as wise as God would never do that.

If that person has this sort of track record, the odds are pretty good that he is going to follow his track record in this next thing.

This is especially problematic for us today because we have been given so much to begin with now. We live in the wealthiest nation that has ever graced this Earth. I do not know if grace is the right word for it. But, God has given it. God has graced this nation with the all this wealth; the most that has ever been on this earth.

Yet, we are a nation in debt. This nation has the highest national debt of any in the world. None of the other nations come close.

And, personal debt exceeds that! Bankruptcies are frequent, both for individuals and businesses. In fact, they no longer carry the stigma that they used to. So many people and businesses have had to file bankruptcy of one form or another, that it is just thought of any more as the way that things are done now. It is all adding to this individual/private debt. It is sad. People no longer think of it as something they would never do.

It is just like divorce. It used to be one of those things that no one would ever think of doing. But, over the years, it has become common enough, and has lost its stigma.

As Christians, we need to buck this trend! We need to go the other direction. Of all people on the face of the earth, we should be the most conscientious of all in the use of our money, for the simple reason, if nothing else that God tells us so much about money in His word. How many of Jesus' parables had to do with money? How many times did He talk about money in terms of teaching? Like the coin He had Peter pull out of the fish's mouth, or the mites the widow lady threw into the treasury. Even His clearing of the Temple (twice) had to do with moneychangers, and cheating for the sacrificial animals.

Money is such a big part of our lives, that Jesus Himself, and His apostles, and the prophets speak about it frequently.

One of the first things said about Abraham is that He was a very wealthy man, in gold and silver, and cattle.

Of course, David's wealth is famous; and Solomon's was beyond that!

And how many of the Proverbs, and the book of Ecclesiastes is about money and the use of wealth, and time; and labor to get wealth?

We have all of these examples in the Word, here, about using money wisely. We of all people should be the most conscientious in our use of it, because it tells God how we are going to handle power.

Now, all three of these verses that we just read (Luke 16:10-12), say basically the same thing. There are nuances of difference, but the basic underlying meaning, here, is that if we cannot handle this, how are we going to be able to handle that?

Verses 11 and 12 add the element of trustworthiness. We will read those again:

Luke 16:11 Therefore if you have not been faithful?

Faithful! There it is!

Luke 16:11 ?in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

If you have been given something that is relatively worthless in the great scheme of things, but

even *that* you cannot be trusted to handle right, who is going to give you something that really matters? That is what He is saying if I may paraphrase it that way.

Luke 16:12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

We can go back to the parable of the minas on this. It is the same principle. The minas belonged to the other man. And here, two of these servants were faithful with what was another man's, but one was not. One did not even bother to do anything with it.

We can use this for any type of blessing that God has given us.

If you cannot be trusted with something that is not your own?say you borrow some friend's chainsaw, and you break the thing, do you think that he is going to let you use his new chainsaw? Not on your life! He will do it for you before he gives it to you again.

Lurking in the background of these scriptures is God. Will God entrust us with God-like powers if we cannot even be trusted with a little bit of money?that paper in your pocket?just worthless on its face?it is paper. Of course, it equals a value, supposedly. It used to be the money we had in gold in Fort Knox. It was supposed to be representative of that. Now it is just digits?ones and zeros?in a computer somewhere. And, how much are they worth? It is all relative.

But, certainly what God will give us in His kingdom is real! It is something that works. If you think it works to have money in this world, just wait until you are given some of God's power. You will be able to tap into all the energies of the universe to be able to get something done that really matters.

We could go to any scripture in Revelation that speaks about the New Heavens, and the New Earth. Revelation 22 talks about the healing of the nations and the trees there. All of these things will be at our fingertips. If we cannot even use our money well, will God trust us with, as it said here in verse 11, the true riches?

Please go back to Revelation 21. I want to just read verse 7 to pick up the concept of what we are to be given. I am really only interested in the one phrase, but we will read the whole sentence.

Revelation 21:7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

Everything! This is not hyperbole! This is God's promise! If you overcome, and this is not just sins, how about our inability to handle money? If we are able to overcome that, and learn how to handle it right, and set a budget, to live within our means, to be able to use it for good, and not for evil, our reward will be all things.

Like I said, this is not just something that God just throws in there to get us excited. It is not marketing language. It is the truth.

Hebrews 2:5-8 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

Is that not incredible?

This is said in the Psalms, David is the writer of the psalm quoted here. The impression that comes from this is that it was not at that time that God had said that He would put all things in subjection under man's feet. It was way back, in the beginning when God was figuring out what He was going to do to make His plan unfold, and how He wanted it to come out. And He planned for angels. But, at least to that point, at the very latest, He had already decided that angels were not going to be the ones to inherit all things.

He had already planned for mankind to become His children. And, that when they completed their course, and the whole works that He had put into motion finally came to the point where they were ready, they would be given everything! All that He had would be theirs.

This is a staggering thought, when you really think about it.

God made these wonderful beings?angels?and all of the splendor that they have. Just read Ezekiel 28 and see how God made the one who became Satan. And you think, "Man! How am I going to become like that, even?"

I have been telling a few people that my wife's been reminding me that I am almost 40. And, I am beginning to notice myself. A few little aches and pains getting out of bed. My hair is getting grayer?not just gray, but grayer. I am getting various moles on parts of my body, and my joints do not work quite as well as they used to. My eyes have always been bad, so that is not a problem. But, I do not seem to be getting better. I do not seem to be going toward the angel type of body and splendor. I seem to be going the other way back toward worm! That is what David said we are!

And so, having all things being put under us just seems so amazing. But, that is what God says. Of course, the fullness of this gift has yet to be realized. It will be fulfilled when we finally enter God's rest, which is talked about in Hebrews 4, when we are glorified?changed in the first resurrection?and given the offices of Kings and Priests to our God in His Kingdom.

But that is still a while yet. We do not know how long. I am not saying a while in terms of history where we have hundreds of years. It is a while in terms of living our lives. We do not know how long we have. We do not know how long God is going to allow us to continue to toil.

This is on the same theme:

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

See, God wants us, so badly, to be His sons and daughters in His Kingdom, that He was willing to give up His best Friend. What He considered to be everything that He had. His only companion. The only One of His Like. The only One that He could really speak to, communicate with. The only One who had been by His side for millennia, planning, thinking, supposing, wondering, projecting all these things that would happen in after ages.

But, He was willing to give all that up if it would bring us to Him.

So, that shows you how much that He is on our side, and how much He is willing to give so that we can overcome, so that we can get rid of the bad habits we have. So, that we can learn how to spend our money wisely, and therefore, be in His kingdom, and be given, then, the power, the authority, and all things that He wants to give us in that time to help others.

So, if God has already said that He is going to give us all these things, should we not be learning how to handle what we already have? Does it not make sense that what we learn now will indeed give us valuable experience and wisdom that we will be able to draw upon in times ahead?

If we prove faithful and trustworthy now, we will be faithful then, too. It just makes sense.

But then, we will be faithful in the greater responsibilities. As we have said before so many times, this life is the training ground for the one to come. This is our lab time.

And the one that we are going toward is the one that really counts. So, we had better do our work now, and get all the experience, and learn all the lessons and start showing?proving?to God that we are worthy of the things that He wants to give us.

I want to get more practical now. Think of this in terms of you and me at the Feast, because with this ten percent of our income in our pockets, we can consider ourselves rich to a degree. So, what is Paul's advice?

I Timothy 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. *Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Yes, it is today?the here and now?during the Feast that we are laying this sure foundation that we can then stand on in the world to come.

Paul's advice here begins with a caution against pride.

Is not pride the foundation of sin? Is that not what got Satan into trouble? His pride to think that he could have more, that he deserved more? His pride to think that he could run things like God Himself? That God did not give him the position that he deserved when he had all these skills? Not thinking, that it was God who gave those things to him.

But, when a person has money, his flush state seems, more often than not, to go to his head. Even "temporary" money like we have here during these eight days has a way of making us feel a kind of invincibility that we have a great deal of margin of error. We can feel satisfied with the money we have. We can