

Prayer: May words of our mouths & the mediations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

“EARN ALL YOU CAN!”

Today people of God, we are dealing with the fact that one thing we should do with God’s money is earn it. That statement seems pretty obvious, since if we don’t earn any money, it would be challenging to live on this planet. There are lots of ways to earn money – everything from putting in the effort to get a loose tooth out and get a quarter for it, to mowing lawns and soon shoveling snow, to selling products ranging from unused clothing to arts and crafts.

Lastly, and this is especially for those who want to earn a lot of God’s monies and be one of those Christian rich people, practice being rich. How do you do that? Easy – you do it by working hard and being generous right now with what you have. I read a very profound statement in preparing this sermon that really made me think. “How you use your money now is exactly how you’ll use your money should you become rich” (Hopper). Think about that. If you are generous with little, likely you will be generous with much. If you waste money now, if you earn more, you will just waste more. Practicing being rich means that you practice giving generously the money God has already given you. As Blomberg writes: “The gospels never depict a well-to-do person who is a genuine believer and yet who is not simultaneously generous in giving of his or her treasure” (Blomberg 56).

What does a 1st Century carpenter living in Jerusalem and an 18th Century priest from England have in common? Well, they both loved God deeply and they both talked a LOT about money. I’m talking about Jesus and John Wesley. Jesus, you’ve probably heard of. John Wesley was a man who wanted to transform his church; he wanted to reach people outside of the walls of the church (The Church has left the building) and give people practical heartfelt ways to follow Jesus. He really annoyed his colleagues because he dared to talk about money.

Jesus, of course, had quite a few things to say about money. Take some time to read all of Luke 16; but especially focusing on Luke 16:1-13. It is a strange parable in which a manager cooks his books in order to gain favor of his customers so that when his boss throws him out of his job, his customers will help him out. And then the wealthy man believe it or not, commends the manager for his shrewdness. Even today, Christians can get all muddled up in the dishonesty of the manager’s actions. But the main point, is what Jesus says next— *that that we who are followers of Jesus need to be just as smart about how we use our resources as those who are not followers of Jesus.*

John Wesley loved this parable. He preached on this specific story at least 27 times between 1741 and 1758. And why did he love it? Because Wesley understood that money is an important part of our lives and that God calls us to be street smart with what we do with all of our resources.

Wesley lived in a time in England in which the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer and he was very distraught about this. He spent a fair amount of time in debtors prison sharing the Gospel with people there, and he had empathy for how people could find themselves there. Even his father had spent time in debtors' prison, which was a fairly common experience for the poor. Wesley understood that the wealthy had a distinct interest in making more wealth and keeping the poor, poor; and he found truth and hope in this parable that Jesus tells because the parable is clear that Jesus wants us to be smart about how we use our resources, wise about how to earn and spend our money.

In general, the Bible recognizes that money is a tool, and while it acknowledges the great temptation we all have to see it as an end to itself, it can be a very useful tool. Money, of course, provides for the things we need; a place to live; food to eat; educational expenses; transportation; etc. So, Wesley came up with a simple way of thinking about our money. He said, “Earn all you can; save all you can; and give all you can.”

Today I want to talk with you about earning all you can. This may seem like a strange thing to say in a church, but Jesus never shied away from money. He wanted people to earn money honestly and use it for the Kingdom of God. And of course, that’s the key, how do we continue to trust God fully, to worship God alone, while also dealing with money? And I will tell you, this is not a temptation only for the rich. This is a temptation we all have, whether we are poor or

wealthy, how do we keep God at the forefront and use our money as a tool? Douglas Hicks wrote in his article, “Making a Good Living.” The challenge of most Christians in developed economies today is ensuring that not only our own needs but the needs of others are met.” (Pages 117-132 in *On Our Way*, ed. by Dorothy Bass & Susan Briehl.)

So, Wesley encourages us to make all we can. Of course, he does this with a few stipulations that are helpful to us and keep us centered on God. Wesley said, “Earn all you can by honest industry, using all possible diligence in your calling.” Wesley knew that there are plenty of ways to make a lot of money that is dishonest and takes advantage of people, and he would never encourage that. Instead, he encourages us to think about what our calling is, how is God calling us to use our gifts, skills, and talents? And then to follow that calling diligently; not wasting any of our gifts and not wasting an opportunity to make a living using those gifts. We see this in Wesley’s own life. Even though Wesley was a Priest in the Anglican church, he also taught at a university, wrote books, grew herbs in his backyard, and many more things in which his talents were used to either make money or benefit his community in some way.

Wesley also said, “Earn all you can with paying more for it than it is worth.” Let that one sink in. Earn all you can without paying more for it than it is worth. And then he goes on to say that any job that affects your health, physical abilities, or mentally, or spiritually, is not worth it. Wesley notes that we should not continue in a business if it deprives us of time to sleep or eat. If we are earning all we can for God’s sake, and it is part of God’s will that we take care of ourselves and have whole and healthy lives, then the two shouldn’t work against each other. Then Wesley goes on to say to earn all we can, but not at the expense of losing our soul. If what you’re doing to earn all you can is destroying who you are, then it is definitely not worth it.

Finally, Wesley said, “Earn all you can, but not at the expense of your neighbor.” What we do to earn money should give all people life not death; not ill health; not make them poorer; not take away their livelihood. In other words, the golden rule of loving your neighbor as yourself is true with how we earn and spend our money too.

Proverbs 31 is another great model of what Wesley is talking about. There’s some speculation that the woman they are writing about didn’t actually exist. But I’ve known women like this! The writer of Proverbs tells us about this amazing woman who works with wool and flax to make fabric; buys land and creates a fruitful vineyard; she provides for her household; she is cunning when it comes to what people will buy in the marketplace; and she also opens her hands to the needy; reaches out to the poor; a teaching of kindness is on her tongue and she doesn’t worry about the future.

This is what Wesley is talking about, to be industrious for God; to use the gifts we have but not in a winner takes all kind of way that the world tempts us into; not into a competitive dog eat dog situation in which if you win another loses. God invites us to use our gifts to be as smart as those who think they’re going to be satisfied when they climb their way to the top, but to do so while knowing who we are serving to be freed up to serve God, not our money.

So, while Wesley is giving us a similar message that the world tells us, Wesley says to earn all we can while the world tells us to get as much money as possible; they do so for very different reasons. Wesley encouraged people to earn all the money they could so they could save all the money they could so they could give all the money they could. He saw that in order to be freed up to do what God is calling us to do, we needed to focus on trusting God while also using our skills, gifts, and talents, to share with the world— all to God’s glory.

Sibling of Christ - Earn all you can. I love the wisdom limits that were put upon the pursuit of gain such as, “Earn all you can, but not at the expense of your health.” And “Earn all you can, but not at the expense of your soul.” And “Earn all you can, but not at the expense of your neighbor”.

Jesus calls us to be wise with all of our lives, and that includes our money. Our God is a generous God, and as people created in God’s image, we have been created for generosity! It’s why it feels so good to give! God desires for us to have enough— to have more than enough— so that we can be faithful in our resources and care for others who do not have enough. What would it look like in your life to earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can all for the glory of God?