

# “Let Go of Resources I - Possessions”

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Feb. 6, 2011

Texts: 2 Cor. 9:8-10, Mat. 6:19-21, Phil. 4:10-20, (James 4:1-10)

There once was an eight year-old lad that was “built too close to the sidewalk.” One day something happened at home that he didn’t like. So, he loaded up his little red wagon with all his most important possessions and set off for town, about five miles away. He was going to have a grand time with all his possessions, he would see movies and eat hotdogs and popcorn, until he realized he did not have any money. With a jerk he “swang” his red wagon around and headed for the house as fast as his little Buster Browns would take him, which wasn’t very fast since he was built too close to the sidewalk. He walked right in to his mother and bold said, “Mommy, I need my money in my piggy bank because I’m going to town.” For some reason he did not understand at the time, he didn’t get it. At that point he made a profound decision and said, **“I’m not going until I get my money.”** It took another ten years before he got his money. The little boy who was “built too close to the sidewalk” grew up and did leave home as promised, to have a big time on his own. But, he did find his way back home...whenever he ran out of clean clothes. Jesus told about another young man that did the same, but in that story his father gave him the piggy bank. And, he made his way back home too. Wasn’t it wonderful to be a child and get all your worldly possessions in a red wagon and a piggy bank? That piggy bank is long gone, but I really wish I still had that red wagon.

Paul understood something about the importance of worldly possessions. He was sitting in prison somewhere in the Roman Empire for preaching that Jesus was God’s Son, sent to save the world. Nearly everywhere he went he met severe opposition from Jews and pagans alike, which included frequent arrests and several attempts on his life. This Paul, from a prominent Jewish family who wielded sufficient power and wealth to secure Roman citizenship, was now treated like any common thief or tax dodger, trapped in squalor and ankle-deep in filth. Besides the stifling lack of sanitation, no food was provided other than that delivered by friends and family members or shared among cellmates. This man who studied under the most influential rabbi in Jerusalem, and was a highly-respected Pharisee, reduced to nothing in the eyes of many, a public menace. How could this one who was accustomed to the finest things the Roman world offered survive in such a seemingly God-forsaken place as a first-century prison? In his letter to the Church in Philippi written from that prison cell, in chapter 3 stated his pedigree and then laid out the reason for his strength:

<sup>7</sup>...whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

<sup>8</sup>More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...”

He had found something greater than all his worldly wealth and power, he had found his reason for living and for dying – Jesus Christ, his Messiah and Lord.

This was his condition when he penned the words we read from chapter 4. He received a gift from his partners in ministry, the believers in the Church in Philippi who had heard of his situation. They understood what he was going through and wanted to help by sending him something to relieve his suffering. The interesting thing here is how he received it. His words are unusual and easily misunderstood, perhaps sounding even curt. He uses language from commerce in saying that he had ~~received~~ their gift as payment in full and his letter was their receipt. Though thankful, he almost seems to disregard their gift by implying he really didn’t need anything, even though he was impoverished. His joy was not so much in their gift as it was for the sign of their faithful discipleship. He was excited that they would receive the blessing of grace from God for giving. He shared a secret of his strength hidden from the rest of the world; he has discovered how to be filled with joy in any and all situations, lavish or languishing. **“I can do all things through HIM who strengthens me.”** He doesn’t look to anything material for security or sustenance. He has transferred his ownership of all possessions to his Lord who was his strength. **Life is not sustained by the material but the spiritual grace of God.**

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote to the believers there in a church torn by discord and feuding factions. Previously he had shared the need of the suffering “saints” in Palestine in order to collect an offering. As he was soon going back to Corinth, he reminded them of their promised donation. These immature Christians had an opportunity for spiritual growth by offering the good work of a significant gift to the needs of others. But first they would have to learn to look beyond themselves and their pettiness. By giving God control of their possessions and wealth in the form of a generous offering to those in great need they would be assured of blessings,

**God’s “all sufficiency in all things at all time for all good works.”** God had blessed them, so they could be a blessing to others, and in so doing they would receive **spiritual abundance** in return. Their good work, though not the cause of their salvation, would be **evidence of it.**

In both these letters he is stating a spiritual principle he himself had learned to live by – **Christians are not to live by material things**, be they money, food, clothes, or houses. **The only thing that mattered was their spiritual condition with God. When that relationship was in balance, everything they need would be fully supplied.** **By letting go of the control of their wealth they discover a much greater wealth while still having much more than they will ever need.**

Jesus said (Matt.6:19-21) “Do not lay up treasures on earth...but treasures in heaven. Where your treasure is, your heart will be also.”

Steven Brown, Pastor of Key Biscayne Presbyterian Church, Key Biscayne, FL, tells the story of a Polish king who was out hunting with friends when he disappeared. They looked for him four days without success. Then, shopping in the marketplace, one of them spotted the king-working as a mere servant, a porter in the market. They reprimanded him for serving in such a demeaning way, but the king responded: "Gentlemen, the load I have quitted is far heavier than the one you see me now carry. I have slept more in the last four nights than I have in all my reign. Elect whom you choose; for me it would be madness to return to court." (Preaching-Vol. 4, #2.)

God doesn’t expect everyone to take such extreme measures as to forsake our responsibilities, but God does expect us to take the extreme step of turning all our financial and material resources over to God’s control. When we understand that it all belongs to God, we have a whole new view and freedom from that “burden.” God will see we have all we need and abundantly more while we use God’s resources to meet the needs of many others. There is great joy for us by the grace that flows through our proper relationship with God.

#### **EMPTY OR FULL (Source Unknown)**

I gave them to Him,  
All the things I'd valued so,  
Until I stood there empty-handed.  
Every glittering toy did go.  
And I walked earth's lonely highways  
In my rags and poverty;  
'Till I heard His voice entreating,  
"Lift your empty hands to me."

Empty hands I lifted to Him  
And He filled them with a store  
Of His own transcendent riches  
Till my hands could hold no more.  
And at last I comprehended,  
With my mind so slow and dull,  
That God could not pour His riches  
Into hands already full.

**Jesus said in Matt 9:19-21,23) “Seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness and all things (material) will be given to you too!” Will you demonstrate your salvation by letting go of your financial and material resources and trusting it all to God? He won’t let you down. He will replace them with lasting treasures.**