

GAIN THAT IS LOSS

Sermon for July 8, 2006 by Ken Kreider

I have heard that a few famous people are building homes here in beautiful St. George, Utah. I have heard that one of them is multi-billionaire Bill Gates, the richest man in the world according to Forbes Magazine. Now imagine that you are shopping at the grocery store one day and you run into none other than Bill Gates. And so you say, "Hey Bill! How's it going?" And in the course of the conversation, he has a proposition for you. He wants to give you a billion dollars, but you must spend it all in one year, and in one year you must jump off the tallest building in St. George and go splat on the pavement below. Are you in? I don't think you'd do it and neither would I. But I wonder how many people would take up such an offer. If you have ever seen a reality show like Fear Factor, you may not be surprised to see someone take up such an offer. On Fear Factor, people do crazy things risking their lives in effort to win \$50,000. Don't worry, I'm not in the habit of watching that show, but I have seen it. That's my disclaimer.

Actually, many many people have taken up a very similar offer without even realizing it. How many people spend their lives in pleasure seeking only to die within about 70 or 80 years when they could have lived for Christ and lived forever? In the seventeenth century the mathematician Blaise Pascal formulated his infamous pragmatic argument for belief in God in a book called *Pensees*. The argument runs as follows:

If you erroneously believe in God (in other words – if you believe in God and you are wrong), you lose nothing (assuming that death is the absolute end), whereas if you correctly believe in God (that is, if you believe in God and you are right), you gain everything (eternal bliss). But if you correctly disbelieve in God (that is, if you don't believe in God and you are right), you gain nothing (death ends all), whereas if you erroneously disbelieve in God (that is, if you don't believe in God and you are wrong), you lose everything (eternal damnation).

How should you bet? Regardless of any evidence for or against the existence of God, Pascal argued that failure to accept God's existence risks losing everything with no payoff on any count. The best bet, then, is to accept the existence of God. By the way, 1 year is 1/70th of 70 years, but 70 years is nothing to eternity.

The average life expectancy in the United States is around 77.6 years. The Bible says in [Psalm 90:10](#) "The length of our days is **seventy years**— or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." Most people at one point in their lives or another ask themselves, what is there that is truly worth living for? God gives us something to live for, doesn't He?

Once there were some children building a beautiful sandcastle on the beach. It was just like a medieval castle complete with lookout towers and a moat and drawbridge. And they had their little toy horses and were just having a great time, when the sun began to set over the horizon. The father said, "Well, it's time to go."

Reluctantly, the children started to walk away from their beautiful work of art in the sand. And as they walked away, one little girl turned to take one last look at the beautiful sandcastle, and said, "Daddy, do you think the sandcastle will still be here tomorrow?" And the Father responded, "Well, dear, it might still be here tomorrow." She then asked, "How long do you think it will be here?" And the father, knowing that the tide would soon come in, responded, "Nothing on Earth lasts forever, dear." Things on Earth do not last forever, do they? Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-20, **19**"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Now let us turn to one of Jesus parables in Luke12:**15** And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

16And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Now let me ask you, from where did this man get all the things that he had? Oh, you say, from working hard, or perhaps he had an inheritance. But no matter how you look at it, this man had received everything from God. All that we have comes from God. The sun shines on the just and the unjust. Radio host, Rush Limbaugh often refers to himself as, "Talent on loan from God." And he may be trying to be funny, but to each one of us, all that we have, and all of our talents are on loan from God. The question is, "How are we using these talents?"

Now this rich man in this story in Luke had a dilemma – what to do with all his riches. I used to listen to a financial advisor on the radio, Clark Howard. And I remember one time a lady calling in who had an extra \$200,000 that she didn't know what to do with. I remember thinking, "I wish I had her problem. Give it to me; I'll do something with it."

The rich man's barns were full to overflowing. He did not know what to do with the surplus. He did not think of God, who had given him all of his blessings. He did not realize that God had made him a steward over His goods so that he could help the poor and needy. He had the opportunity to be a channel for the blessings of God,

but thought only of ministering to his own comfort. Many hungry people could have been fed, many naked clothed, many sad hearts made glad. I like the way it reads in Christ's Object Lessons, p.258: "This man's aims were no higher than that of the beasts that perish. He lived as if there were no God, no heaven, no future life; as if everything he possessed were his own, and he owed nothing to God or man."

This man lived for self. And how does world view a man like this? They would see him as a prosperous citizen, wouldn't they? Psalm 49:18 "Men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself." But 1 Corinthians 3:19 says, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

The Lord had different plans for this man. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." In a moment, in the blink of an eye, gone, all of it – all that you have worked your whole life for. "Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Why not take the advice of Jesus and store up treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy?

You don't know when you are going to die. Now let's suppose that this man had gone on to live a few more years and eat, drink, and be merry as planned. Would it have been worth it? Hear Jesus' answer, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own soul?" "You may plan for merely selfish good, you may gather together treasure, you may build mansions great and high, as did the builders of ancient Babylon; but you cannot build wall so high or gate so strong as to shut out the messengers of doom." COL259

STORY OF BELSHAZZAR

There is a story very similar to this rich man's story in the Old Testament. Let's turn to Daniel chapter 5. Starting with verse 1, we read "King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. 2 While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father ^[a] had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

5 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. 6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way."

Now imagine you are sitting at the dinner table one day or doing whatever it is you do in your spare time, and a hand appears and writes a message on the wall. How would you react? My guess is that you'd be in a state of shock, if didn't have a heart attack.

So here was King Belshazzar celebrating and priding himself on how rich his kingdom had become. And as he was praising the gods of gold and silver and iron and wood and stone, a hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall. After searching and searching for someone that could read the message, Daniel was brought in, and God revealed to Daniel the meaning of the message.

Now picking up the story in Daniel 5:18-30, Daniel is speaking to the king: 18"O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. **19** Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. **20** But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he

was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. **21** He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

22 "But you his son, ^[d] O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. **23** Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. **24** Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

25 "This is the inscription that was written: Mene , Mene , Tekel , Parsin ^[e]

26 "This is what these words mean: Mene ^[f] : God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

27 Tekel ^[g] : You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

28 Peres ^[h] : Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

29 Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, ^[i] was slain, **31** and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Belshazzar was very self-centered. He was only interested in what he could get for himself and advancing his own kingdom. He should have learned from his father Nebucadnezzar's experience. Remember, God removed King Nebucadnezzar from his throne and humbled him, and later he was miraculously restored to his throne, and he finally gave glory to God. But Belshazzar apparently didn't learn from this. How many today are, like Belshazzar, living a life of ease. One day, the dreadful sentence may be pronounced on them also, "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting." What does that mean? It means that you haven't done what you should have or could have done with your God given talents to advance the cause of Christ. It means that you buried your talent. We should be interested in expanding God's kingdom rather than our own, amen? **Ezekiel 17:24** "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it."

"It is the spirit of Satan to get, to draw to self. It is the spirit of Christ to give, to sacrifice self for the good of others." COL259 Look what He has given for us. He left the throne of Heaven, and risking the universe came to this sin filled world to rescue you and me. How do you respond to that kind of love? With indifference? Or does it inspire you to share that same love with others? What is our object in life, our mission? Have you ever asked yourself, "Why am I here?" If we live only to serve

ourselves, and just to gratify our own desires, we are no better than the animals, or as Ellen White puts it, "no better than the beasts that perish."

"Let none suppose that they can live a life of selfishness, and then, having served their own interests, enter into the joy of their Lord. In the joy of unselfish love they could not participate. They would not be fitted for the heavenly courts. They could not appreciate the pure atmosphere of love that pervades heaven. The voices of the angels and the music of their harps would not satisfy them.

In the great judgment day those who have not worked for Christ, those who have drifted along, carrying no responsibility, thinking of themselves, pleasing themselves, will be placed by the Judge of all the earth with those who did evil. They receive the same condemnation."COL

Hoarded wealth is not merely useless, it is a curse.

But Christ sanctions no lavish or careless use of means. His lesson in economy, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," is for all His followers. (John 6:12.)

The more means we expend in display and self-indulgence, the less we can have to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Every penny used unnecessarily deprives the spender of a precious opportunity of doing good. It is robbing God of the honor and glory which should flow back to Him through the improvement of His entrusted talents."COL365

But how are we to use our talents? Christ was our example.

"The great work of redemption weighed continually upon His soul."

The work to which as Christians we are called is to co-operate with Christ for the salvation of souls. This work we have entered into covenant with Him to do. To neglect the work is to prove disloyal to Christ.

Every effort made for Christ will react in blessing upon ourselves.COL354

And reading from COL351,

"God also entrusts men with means. He gives them power to get wealth.

Our money has not been given us that we might honor and glorify ourselves. As faithful stewards we are to use it for the honor and glory of God. Some think that only a portion of their means is the Lord's. When they have set apart a portion for religious and charitable purposes, they regard the remainder as their own, to be used as they see fit. But in this they mistake. All we possess is the Lord's, and we are accountable to Him for the use we make of it. In the use of every penny, it will be seen whether we love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves.

Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God's children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defense for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing for the necessities of life, in blessing others, and advancing the cause of Christ."COL351

MONNKEY TRAPPED

One day several years ago, I was watching "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" and they were talking about how they would catch a certain species of monkeys in Africa.

The monkeys lived near some very interesting rock formations. The rocks had many holes in them about the size of your hand. And what they would do is they would put some food into the holes and step back and wait for the monkeys to come. The monkeys would come and put their hands into the holes to get the food. They would make a fist to grab the food, but then they could not pull their hand out. Then the humans would just walk up to the monkeys and capture them, because the monkeys would not be able to pull their fist out of the holes and they just would not let go of the food even to keep from being captured.

How many of us today are just like those monkeys? Are we so tied to our possessions that we would rather be captured by the enemy of our souls rather than to just let go?

END: POMPEII

When I was attending college at Walla Walla, I saw an interesting film about Pompeii in one of my Bible classes. The film showed the mummified bodies of people that were trapped in volcanic lava from Mount Vesuvius. Pompeii was destroyed a volcano in August of 79AD. People were going about their daily lives when all of a sudden, they were killed in an instant by an erupting volcano that rained down upon the city. Nearby Mount Vesuvius had exploded. Pompeii was buried. It remained buried for over 1600 years. Now it has been rediscovered. Excavations have revealed a beautiful city with crevices of human body forms in the volcanic debris. Over time, the human remains have decayed, leaving only a crevice in the rock. The excavators filled the crevices with plaster and have made molds of many people in the positions in which they were when they died.

People were frozen in time. They were covered by the lava and died instantly. They were caught in various positions, some running, some lying down, some praying. One particular lady was running, but remembered her bag of pearls and reached back to grab it, and that is the very position she died in. At a moment when she knew she was about to die, she couldn't leave her precious bag of pearls. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Hymn 468 Child of the King