

LEAVE IT TO THE LORD

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on September 19, 1954 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee and heard over radio station WLAC.

Several years ago I knew a man who became a very prosperous business man, although he began as a poor farm boy. His first efforts when he came to the city were to pay off the debts which he had incurred. Having discharged those responsibilities he immediately went on to establish a business of his own and in the years since he has built that business into an outstanding enterprise. Some nine or ten years ago he told me that he had been offered half a million dollars for it, but that he didn't sell because he thought it was worth more. With his other holdings he should now be worth something like a million dollars. The man of whom I speak is a very fine man. He is a faithful Christian and has rendered faithful service to the Lord throughout his life. The tragic part of the story is that he has two children, neither of whom is faithful to the church. In the next few months or years that man will die and the Lord will lose nearly a million dollars. When he dies he plans to leave his estate largely to his children. The Cause of Christ will lose nearly a million dollars. That is tragedy.

The Lord Has Lost Millions

A few weeks ago when I was in Detroit they told me the story of the beginning of the Ford Motor Company. Of the five men who originally invested in the Ford Motor Company, two were members of the church. Visualize Ford's present, huge River Rouge plant, the largest single industrial installation in the world. It is worth well beyond a billion dollars. Two of the five original owners were members of the Lord's church. Recently, I went down the assembly line and watched them assemble the new cars--one every fifty-five seconds. This is only one of the twenty assembly lines. What power! What wealth! And two of the original investors were members of the Lord's church. "Oh, what glorious prospects," we might have thought fifty years ago, if we could have foreseen the growth of that company. But this, too, is a sad story. One of those investors sold his stock early, and the other was lost to the church. Today, not one dime of what might have been expected finds its way into the Lord's treasury. I say again, that's tragedy.

I know of another Christian business man who gave generously during his lifetime, both of his money and of himself. Into his will he wrote that his estate might be for the care of his wife as long as she lives, but that it might go, at the end of her life, to provide a Christian education for young men and women. What a difference! As long as time shall last his dollars will be serving the Lord. What a difference! One of the most tragic stories I know is the story of countless scores of people who have been blessed by the Lord, until they were very wealthy, only to let their wealth escape the Lord's treasury when they died.

God's Stewards

I want to talk with you today on the theme: "Leave It To The Lord." By this expression I do not mean what we often mean--leave the affairs of our lives to the Lord and let him work them out. I believe in that, too, but today's emphasis is different. We are God's stewards and must make an accounting for the material things which he has entrusted to our care. When we come to die we have some responsibility to children and relatives and others, but our primary responsibility is to Jehovah, our God. We don't want to miss heaven by leaving what God has given us to some cause other than the Cause of Christ. We don't talk of this matter often, but we should. It is something that the five hundred families of this congregation need to consider. At least a part of what God has given us we must return to him when we die.

We have often preached that we are God's stewards, but let me take a moment to read from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew where the Lord states the matter clearly. Matthew twenty-five begins with the story of the ten virgins, and then comes in verse fourteen to the parable of the talents: "For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey." (Matt. 25:14-15). That's our Lord; that's us. God has given us our lives, our abilities, our opportunities, and I think we will agree that he has given us our successes, financial and otherwise. This is the story of the man who had five talents and made other five, of another who had two and made other two. When they came to render to the Lord the increase on his investment he said, "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25:21).

This is also the story of the man who had one talent and who digged in the earth and hid it. To him the Lord said, "Thou wicked and slothful servant." The investment God had made in him had been a failure, for this servant failed to give God his due. The story ended, "Cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25:30). Even more significant than this passage, if possible, is one in the final book of the Bible: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is." (Rev. 22:12). If I understand the meaning of these passages it is that we are God's stewards, which means literally God's administrators, supervisors, or managers. We are in charge of God's bounty, and after a while must give account of that which God has given us like those men of whom we have read.

What I am saying does in no way imply that we are not to do something about it now. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6:19). In I Corinthians 16, verse 2. Paul said, "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store as he may prosper." We must do that every Sunday.

Building Up An Estate

Most of us in the course of our lives build up an estate. Now that word estate sounds at first like a great mass of money, but whatever we leave is an estate. It may be \$5,000, or \$500, or \$5.00. Whatever we leave is an estate. Here is the way it happens in the average family. We don't know how long we are going to live. We may live to be eighty years of age, and therefore it is imperative that we save something for old age. You ought to be doing it. I ought to be doing it, it is logical, it is reasonable, it is right. We ought to save enough to take care of us when we are old and no longer productive. So we put aside certain savings and certain accumulations for old age. We are assuming that we continue giving as we have been prospered, but we still save for old age.

If instead of living to be eighty we die at sixty-five, we will inevitably leave something behind. It would not be possible to give it into the church treasury now because we might then be a burden on our children or on the church for many years. When we do come to the end of the road, however, we have a responsibility to remember again the Lord's investment in us. We also accumulate a part of our estate by buying a house. For most of us the payments run through a good many years, but if we live, after a while we will own a home. Whether it will be worth \$10,000 or \$15,000 or \$5,000 is not particularly important, it will be part of our estate. Usually we have some insurance that is payable when we die. In addition, there may be certain investments which will be worth something. At the end of our lives most of us will have something left.

I know we have some responsibilities to our children, and I would not encourage anyone to be unmindful of that, but I believe we also have a responsibility to the Lord. The Lord once asked "the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" (Luke 12:20). We assume that the thing to do is to leave our estate to our children. If you do not have a will that is what will happen automatically. The idea that I want to suggest to you, as one who loves you and loves the church, is that many of us need to rethink this matter and include the Lord in what we leave when we die. This is doubly true of those whose children are not members of the church. The Lord has blessed you, and you must remember him when you die. The Lord will still have work to be done after we are gone.

Make A Will

My first suggestion is that we each make a will. I ran across an article the other day from a noted economist, Roger Babson, who said, "Too many people die without leaving wills. The result--financial tangles, family squabbles, lawsuits and a disposition of the property entirely contrary to the wishes of the deceased. Some day each of us will die, making a will can neither hasten nor retard death, but a properly drawn will, executed by a competent lawyer may save post mortem disputes and prevent the distribution of an estate contrary to the wishes of the testator." He then furnished examples of cases he had known where the wishes of the deceased were never met because there was no will. He included a sentence, "everyone, man or woman, who has real estate, bank accounts, securities or a car, should not wait until he is on his death bed when to frame this important document."

In the first place you need to make a will because a will is the only instrument that speaks with authority after you are gone. In the second place, you need to make a will because it insures that your estate will be distributed according to your desires. In the third place, you need to make a will because it prevents misunderstanding among your heirs. In the fourth place, you need to make a will because it permits you to say who will have charge of the handling of your estate. In the fifth place, you need to make a will because it often reduces the expenses of probating the estate and may reduce the estate tax. You need to make a will. When you need a will it is too late to make one. What I wish is that all of us, in these next few days or weeks, would make a will.

Make A Christian Will

The second suggestion is that we make a Christian will As we said a while ago, the Lord made everything, the Lord owns everything, the Lord gives everything and as his administrators, supervisors, managers, and stewards, we owe a responsibility to him. As a steward of God you are responsible for the distribution of your estate after your death, as well as its handling while you live. As Christian stewards we are responsible to God for everything that comes into our hands. God requires an accounting of our stewardship. That obligation continues to the final disposition of our estate--all of which is God's property and over which we are merely stewards. A Christian should make his legal will thoughtfully and prayerfully to see that those he loves are properly protected.

Seek to know the will of God regarding the final disposition of your estate. Write the will of God into your will so that the causes you hold dear will continue to be supported. No man can tell you the will of God regarding the final disposition of your property. Only by prayerfully seeking God's leadership can you know what he wants you to do. When we pass the river of death we shall want the Lord to confess us. I don't see how he can do it if the last act we ever did on earth was to forget him.

I know a man out in Lubbock, Texas, who has four children all of whom are faithful members of the church. That man, in thinking through his responsibility to the Lord has said, "I am going to divide my estate five ways instead of four. I am going to give an equal share to each child and one to the church." Since he owns several hundred acres of land, under which there may be oil, his gift may someday build some church buildings and establish the cause of Christ in some mission fields.

How Do I Begin?

The steps are rather simple. You make a list of all your assets and the names of the persons or causes that you want to benefit at your death. Then you go to see an attorney and list your property to him, suggesting what you wish to have done with your estate. You suggest the person whom you would like to have as your administrator.

It may be that you will want to include a paragraph like this: "I hereby give, devise and bequeath to the Hillsboro Church of Christ, located in Nashville, Tennessee the sum of _____ or the properties, to wit: _____ to be used in promoting the work of the church and the Cause of Christ. I hereby appoint and designate the elders of the Hillsboro Church of Christ, or their successors, whoever they may be, to choose one man from among themselves to serve as the executor of this my last will and testament, to serve without bond. Think what it would mean to the church in the years to come if each family of this congregation would leave at least something to the Lord. We are God's stewards and we have a responsibility along this line.

What Will It Be Used For?

What will happen when we do this? Nothing while we live. We will go along normally until the day of death and then our will will be probated. If we have left a house to the church the elders of this congregation will be able to send a missionary to Nigeria for two or three years. If your income is such that you can leave \$25,000, a family can be sent to Germany for five years and a new congregation can be brought into being. Wouldn't that be wonderful to contemplate in heaven? Also, orphans could be taken care of. Or perhaps in the course of the years you could help a half dozen or a dozen young men to get an education and to become preachers of the gospel by remembering the Lord in your will. Perhaps there could be the building of a meeting house up in Maine, where they are struggling along in a rented hall. Or it may be that you will be able to help this congregation pay for its enlarged facilities so that the Hillsboro church can more quickly go back to a fuller support of mission work throughout the world. Do It Now.

This is a serious responsibility that we are talking of today. It involves our salvation but not only ours for it may effect the eternal destiny of thousands of others. Make a list of what you own and then make a will. Include the Lord for a sizable share. Remember the orphans, remember Christian education, remember the Lord's church, remember that after you die it will be even more important than now to have served the Lord well. Remember, whatever you've got God gave. You are his steward.