

Putting  
Our Possessions  
to Work for  
God

By John Jeter Hurt

†

PROMOTION COMMITTEE OF  
SOUTHERN BAPTISTS  
NASHVILLE, TENN.

DARGAN-CARVER LIBRARY  
S. B. C. HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

## Putting Our Possessions to Work for God

*By John Jeter Hurt*

A Japanese student stood before my congregation. For thirty minutes he had been giving a striking testimony to the power of the gospel in his own life. A small copy of the New Testament was clasped in his hand. A missionary had given it to him some years before. He guessed it had cost about twenty-five cents. He wished he might know now what American had contributed the twenty-five cents that had bought the New Testament, that had been given to him by the missionary, that had led him to Jesus. But listen to his own words:

“When I get to heaven I shall want to see my Saviour first of all, and fall prostrate at his feet in adoration and thanksgiving. Then I shall want to find the missionary who labored so faithfully in our district, and thank him as I have not heretofore. Then I shall go back to Jesus, and beg that he tell me what American it was who gave the twenty-five cents, that bought the New Testament, that led me to salvation,—and I shall want to thank this unknown friend with all my heart for making it possible for me to be a Christian.”

Wouldn't you like to have been that American? Wouldn't you like to be such an American many times over? I would. You and I can be. That's the reason why I am writing these lines for our instruction concern-

ing the way. Several fundamental principles must be kept in mind while we consider.

## I

### Possession is Not Ownership

There is a vast difference between *ownership* and *possession*. We do not own anything, though we may possess a great deal. The doctrine of "ownership" is a pagan conception, not Christian. God's Book uses the word "possession." All unchristian peoples have held that the best title to property is conquest. And conquest was equal to dominion, —ownership. In Roman law ownership meant the legal power to hinder others. English and American law mean essentially that today.

The idea of fight runs through all our deeds to property, and the man with a lance still stands sentinel over our courts and halls of legislation. Professor Holland, of Oxford, says: "The essence of all such rights (of ownership) lies not so much in the enjoyment of the thing as in the legal power of excluding others." According to our laws, then, the meaning of ownership is hindrance.

But God does not recognize our doctrine of ownership. Never mind what the States recognize! God says: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 24: 1). We may run our surveyor's chains as we please, and record their tracings with indelible ink at the court houses; we may fill our barns until their sides burst with abundance; we may pack tight our securities in the safety boxes; we may smile selfishly at the mounting balances to our credit at the banks; and then we may

shout ourselves hoarse declaring it is "Mine! Mine!! Mine!!!" The God who is unmoved by human customs and who does not bend in conformity to human laws, comments sadly, "Fool."

### **Hold Property in Trust for God**

Some day our laws will be written not in terms of hindrance but in terms of helpfulness. But that day cannot come until after we have believed that we are our brothers' keepers. Then we will no longer delude ourselves with the notion that we may hold property *in fee simple*, but will rejoice in the privilege of holding it *in trust* for God and the good it can do. The doctrine of absolute ownership will be cast upon the same scrap-heap to which we have relegated other pagan inheritances. We will become stewards of the manifold blessings which have been entrusted to us for a purpose.

## **II**

### **We Must Recognize the Responsibility of Possessions**

There is a fascination about making money. There is a terrible responsibility about spending it. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., spoke a sad word when he said he envied his father the privilege he had enjoyed of building his fortune from \$2.50 per week on up. But John D. Rockefeller, Jr., spoke an eminently wise word when he said, "Mine has been the prosaic task of spending wisely what another has accumulated." He has met his responsibility with singular faithfulness.

## Need Conscience on Spending Money

"You don't have to urge me to give," said the great-hearted James H. Anderson to me a long time ago, "but just show me, if you can, that the cause for which you plead furnishes the best possible investment for that much of God's money which is entrusted to me." Christian men and women have developed their consciences on the subject of *acquiring* money. They will not *steal* it, they will not *lie* for it, they will not *cheat* in a trade. Christian men and women must now address their consciences to the further problem of *spending* God's money. According to human law the trustee does not own the property that is committed to his care. According to divine law the trustee does not own the property that is committed to his care. It is a terrible thing to check up short with the Court here. It is still worse to check up short with the Court of Heaven.

Responsibility for the right use of our Lord's money is inescapable. Jesus was severe in his dealing with the man who sought to evade this responsibility. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness," said he concerning the one who hoarded instead of investing. Notice that the unfaithful servant had not *stolen*, nor *misappropriated*, nor *borrowed*. He had done *nothing*. His sin was passive rather than active. But sin is failure to do one's best.

If the Baptist business men of the South would open their eyes to see the danger of failing to invest God's money wisely they

would rise up immediately and wipe out every debt upon our Mission Boards. Soldiers of the cross would be able to go back to the front line trenches, and such a tidal wave of religious fervor would be started at home as we have not known in the present generation.

### III

#### **Maybe We Have Not Seen the Possibilities of Possession**

Men are prone to discount the value of their possessions when the assessor calls for them,—also when God calls. “What is that in thine hand?” God asked of Moses. “A rod,” he replied, probably with a falling inflection. But when God got behind that rod it parted the waters of the sea, brought water from the flinty rock, turned the tides of war. God wants what we have. To this he will add what he has.

#### **God Reinforces Dedicated Possessions**

The lad on the other side of the lake brought his lunch to Jesus. Only five loaves and two fishes were in the basket. Jesus added his blessing and fed probably twenty thousand people. Also the lad became immortal. Simon of Cyrene gave a lift to the Cross. That Cross has been lifting the world heavenward ever since. A few men got together in Greenville, South Carolina, put up a few dollars, and started a theological school. They did not know they were founding the great Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I once borrowed a hundred dollars from a layman in Durham, N. C., to help M. T. Rankin

to college. He became an honor graduate at Wake Forest, then at the Seminary, and that hundred dollars is now working in China. None of us knew at the first. We don't have to know, when God calls. That twenty-five cents which bought the New Testament, which led the Japanese to Jesus, will live forever. We speak of the immortality of the soul. I want us to attribute immortality to money also. It goes on and on, lifting men up, or pulling them down. We never see our possessions until we see them in terms of their possibilities.

#### IV

### **Isn't There Such a Thing as the Transmutation of Possessions?**

I tremble at the danger of our persistence in seeing what we have as *things* only. Every man who looks at the latest model automobile this year should ask himself the question, "Can God and I turn that automobile into a missionary?" A consecrated layman told me that every time he saw a hundred-dollar bill he thought of a native evangelist in China. We talk about the equality of opportunity for every individual which is contemplated by our Declaration of Independence, and rejoice in it. The counterpart of this is the right of every individual dollar to prove what it may become when consecrated to the welfare of mankind, and transmuted by the divine favor into spiritual values. The mission of lumber is to provide life; of cotton to become character; of cereals to become sermons for the healing of the nations.

## **Gifts Are Converted into Personalities**

"Behold this dreamer!" should be the apt characterization of every man who bears in his arms the fruitage of God's favor and brings it to the altar. For every such man must dream of what such fruitage will become when the divine breath is put upon it. "I see an angel," said the sculptor, peering into a block of marble. "I see a new heaven and a new earth," said John on the lonely island. Livingstone could hear the croonings of a million black men redeemed from savagery when others heard in Africa nothing but the jargon of the monkey, the jackal and the tiger.

God changes things into personalities, when we give him a chance. The business man may evangelize, and educate, and enlist through his money, if he will. That is what money is for. We miss the value of it if we have not seen this.

### **V**

## **Possessions May Be Transferred**

Jesus said to the rich young man, "Sell . . . distribute . . . and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Paul said in substance, "I know my banker, and am persuaded that he is able to keep my deposit against that day." I was away down in Egypt. I had no money. I presented a slip of paper, and got all the money I needed. That was because I had placed my money properly on this side the Atlantic. I shall need my possessions some day on the other side of the grave. That means I must place them properly on this side of the grave.