

Wasted Wealth

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The classic case of wasted wealth in the New Testament is not the “Prodigal Son,” although he surely wasted his fortune. A much truer case of prodigality (which means *wastefulness*) is the one Jesus describes in Luke 12:16–21. Here is a man who is blessed with exceeding abundance, so much so that he had to build new barns to contain his goods. He assumed that he was fixed for life, but he ignored God, eternity and the needs of his own soul. Consequently, God called him a **fool** and required him to give it all up with the piercing question, “And the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?” Jesus concludes the parable with the application: “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

“Whose shall they be?” is a simple question that should cause us to think seriously about the plans we have made for the distribution of our estate when we no longer live here. Are we not as responsible to God for the disposition of our wealth at the time of our death as we are for the proper stewardship of it during life? In fact, is it not a part of responsible stewardship in this life to legally declare whatever estate we leave will fall into honorable hands and be used for the cause of truth and righteousness? What could be more ironic than for a godly man who staunchly supported the Truth all his life to be so careless as to leave his estate to those who opposed God? He could do more by his death to tear down the Truth (if he left behind very much) than he had done in all his life to build it up. I have heard of more than one case in which a brother or sister would die with no heirs who were even Christians and leave their estate to those who would spend it either in ungodly behavior or to propagate false doctrine. **How can such be viewed in any other way than as a terrible waste of wealth?** The Lord asked a question that we all need to seriously consider when He said, “Whose shall they be?”

I know that this is a ticklish, perhaps a touchy subject to some, yet because it is so important (and because the Lord’s question deals with it) we must not be timid about discussing it. Have you made a will at all? If not, and if you care at all about how your estate is disposed of when you die, you should do so immediately. See a lawyer. It will not take long. Some who have made their wills would do well to reconsider them if they truly want their wealth to go on working for the cause of Christ after they die.

One couple had a farm and equipment valued at a million dollars plus a half-million-dollar life insurance policy on his life. At first, he planned to leave it all to his wife and a small amount to the church when she died. However, they chose the following alternative:

For less than probate court costs, another half-million-dollar policy was bought on his life. They gave the land and equipment to the church, stopping all taxes. They reserved the right to live their remaining days in the farmhouse, tax-free. The church sold the farm and equipment for a million dollars. When the man died, the wife received over thirty thousand dollars annually from his insurance. She decided to move to town, allowing the church to sell the house and receive the profit. Since the church was named second beneficiary of the insurance policies, when she died, the church received another one million dollars.

Just think what this could have done in the wrong hands and what it could do in the right hands! Don't you agree that it is very important to ask, "Whose shall they be?"

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, January 25, 1981, of which I was editor.]

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