

Time to Invest

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I guess we all heard about Bitcoin even though we don't know what Bitcoin is. You probably heard or read about it through the news on TV or in newspaper articles. It became well-known as its price rose sharply around 2017. The news that its price became 6,000 dollars per 1 BTC reminded me of one day in 2010.

I was a missionary to Nepal at that time, and I read an article saying a guy who lived in Florida paid 10,000 BTC for two delivered Papa John's pizzas. It was the first trade of Bitcoin for real items. After I read the article, I became interested in Bitcoin. It was not because I thought it was an asset worth investing in or would be expensive, but because I just wanted to know or understand the new technology, the so-called blockchain technology. So, I thought I would study about it and should buy some bitcoins. At that time, I didn't have much work other than learning Nepali. So, I thought I could have invested my time in studying it.

What do you think I did? What is your guess whether I bought some or not? Of course not. Soon, I became very busy helping the Nepal Methodist Church apply to be an official member of the World Methodist Council and forgot to buy them. So, as I read the article about the sharp rise of its price in 2017, I regretted that I should have bought some bitcoins at that time because I had a hard time paying hospital bills for my son, Gaon.

However, I soon realized I should be thankful that I didn't buy them. I might have probably purchased around 10,000 bitcoins, the same amount the guy used for pizza, which was maybe worth 10-20 dollars at that time. However, if I had purchased some bitcoins, it would have led my life in a worse way. I might have lost peace in my heart just as many other people did. Many people started investing their money in Bitcoin and other virtual currencies, which became a crazy social phenomenon. Many of them couldn't sleep because the virtual-currency markets run 24/7. I could see the false hope and greed of those who invested almost all their resources in the markets, which I don't want to be obsessed with.

I don't blame those who invest assets to earn money. Specific material resources are essential for our lives, just as we all need our daily bread. And in this Capitalistic world we live, we need money to obtain them. Pastors also live in the same world. The United Methodist Church also provides a retirement savings plan for the clergy. Its name is the United Methodist Personal Investment Plan. We all need financial supplies to live our lives. Then, allocating resources with the expectation of earning an income or profit is not at all reprehensible.

Three weeks ago, while I preached with the text of Colossians chapter 1, I said that Paul wanted the Christians of the Colossian church to grow in the knowledge of the Lord. Paul also urges Christians to grow in God in today's text. Paul knows that Christians, too, have limited resources. Investing is, in the end, allocating limited resources appropriately to achieve better or more profitable results. Paul is a man who lived a very spiritually prosperous life. He is sharing with Christians the wisdom of how he invested his life's resources for God and the gospel. Therefore, if we listen to his words and live according to his advice, we too will be able to live a life that pleases God.

Paul talks about what we need to be mindful of and focus on. When we invest to earn money, we also have to decide which assets we want to invest in. Some people invest in real estate to get wealth, while others in stocks or, as mentioned earlier, in virtual currencies such as Bitcoin. Paul advises us not to waste our lives and time on earthly things but to invest in heavenly things. When he says not to set our minds on the things that are on earth, he does not mean to ignore earthly life completely nor make any effort for it at all.

He made various efforts for life on earth. He was an intelligent man who studied under Gamaliel before he met Jesus. He was bilingual, fluent in both Greek and Hebrew. He had leadership enough to spearhead the persecution of Christians. Even after he met Jesus, he remained faithful to his earthly life. He earned money by making tents to self-sponsor for his ministry and evangelical trips. His hard work was not only for his physical life but also for the lives of others on earth. When the Jerusalem church faced financial difficulties due to famine and persecution, Paul urged the churches he served, such as the Galatian and the Corinthian churches, to collect generous gifts for the saints (2 Corinthians 8 and 9). Then, he gave it to the Jerusalem church in person (Romans 15:25). Paul understood our physical limitations.

However, Paul tells us not to set our minds on the things that are on earth. Many people live with setting their hearts on earthly things. We live in the material world and in the capitalistic society. So, people mistakenly think that we can make our lives greater and happier by pursuing worldly power and accumulating wealth. But Psalm 49 tells us: “¹ Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, ² both low and high, rich and poor together.... ⁷ Truly, no ransom avails for one’s life; there is no price one can give to God for it. ⁸ For the ransom of life is costly and can never suffice, ⁹ that one should live on forever and never see the Pit. ¹⁰ When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others.”

The things of this earth can never be responsible for our eternal life. No matter how much wealth we gather on earth, we cannot pay it as a price for our souls. Because our soul is priceless. This is why Jesus came to the world, sacrificed his life, and died for us, for you, and for me. God paid the life of the Son, which is the thing from heaven, as ransom for our soul. Among the things of the earth, there are essential things, of course, that we need while living on this earth. But they will soon become meaningless to us. We must leave them on this earth.

So, Paul says even though we can use our time for earthly things, we should set our minds on things that are above. Whatever we do, we must do it for the glory of the Lord and kingdom of God. We must invest our resources with all our heart, soul, and strength to do what pleases God. That is the only strategy for our successful spiritual investment.

However, even if people know the investment strategy, they fail because they don’t put it into practice. Many people are familiar with stock market quotes such as “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” But when it comes to real investing, false hope and greed lead them to wrong decisions, resulting in catastrophic losses. Similarly, we also have symptoms in our spiritual lives when we focus on the thing on earth. These are sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed. In particular, greed leads us to idolatry, which makes us rely on the god of wealth, Mammon, rather than God the Creator. Likewise, when we focus on life on earth, we fail in our relationships with others. So, we get to have anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language in our hearts and pass them on to others. Thus, we need to examine our hearts as we stand before God.

We've gone through a long pandemic. Many churches have had to endure various difficulties. By having them, we may have had fear in our hearts. But we should focus not on the things on earth that we can see physically but on the heavenly things that we can see spiritually. Still, we have many difficulties and obstacles. Maybe we are in a bear market in our lives.

But spiritual investment should be a long-term investment. It's a quote from one of the well-known investors, Shelby Davis: "Invest for the long haul. Don't get too greedy, and don't get too scared." We live only in our time, but God's will and plan are passed down from generation to generation and eventually to eternity. What we should do is just to trust God and invest our life in the Lord. Let us find something in our life that we can invest in for the heavenly things.

We must first restore the spirit-filled worship. God meets us in worship. I ask that you come to the venue of worship with the most prepared mind and attitude. Don't forget that God can see your heart even though others cannot. We must also restore our identity as a community of faith. We should remember that our spiritual investments and growth are made in the community. So, we need to restore fellowship and love in us. I hope we try to create chances for restoring connections. Depending on your situation, you can participate in person or online. But please do not allow the present situation to be an excuse for neglecting the fellowship of the saints. Finally, God has called us to serve the world. The Lord wants us to fulfill the reign of God on earth. Now we have to start the ministries that have stopped, cautiously but boldly. It is still a difficult time, but we must not hesitate to invest in the heavenly things. We can share wisdom to help each other participate in ministries, whether in person or online. I hope we all pray, give a hand, and be together in our missional works.

As we refer to quotes of great investors when we invest in the market, Paul also gives his wisdom that teaches us the proper attitude for spiritual investment. I conclude today's sermon by reading a quote from Paul, a great spiritual investor. "²³ Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans, ²⁴ since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23-24) Amen.