

Money and Treasure

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Matthew 6:19-34

cck/10/02/2008

Last week Charlotte began this series looking at Kingdom Values as we consider various themes that Jesus taught on in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 to 7.

There are three good reasons to speak about money and giving.

Jesus said a lot about

First, speaking pointed words about money and possessions puts me in good company, namely, with Jesus. It is reckoned that 15 percent of everything Jesus said relates to this topic.

Here are some that you know well ...

"One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).

"Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven . . . Woe to you rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:20).

"Whoever does not renounce all that they have cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15).

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

"Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses in heaven" (Luke 12:33).

"Zacchaeus . . . said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. . . .' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:8-9).

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44).

Jesus "saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them" (Luke 21:1).

"But God said to [the man who built even bigger barns], 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:20-21).

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head . . . Follow me" (Luke 9:58).

Over and over Jesus is relentless in his radical call to what has been termed a wartime lifestyle and a hazardous liberality ("she put in all that she had").

One time he refers to the Old Testament minimum of giving a tenth of your income, endorses it, and then calls for a way of looking at life and money way more radical than the mere tithe.

"You tithe even your spices," he said to the Pharisees. "That's right. You should. But you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23).

So I am in good company with Jesus, not to mention the stories of the book of Acts

"They were selling their possessions . . . and distributing the proceeds . . . as any had need," (Acts 2:45)

or the words of the apostle Paul

"In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity . . . God loves a cheerful giver," (Corinthians 8:2; 9:7)

or James the brother of Jesus

"The flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich person fade away in the midst of their pursuits," (James 1:11).

So the first good reason for talking about giving and money is that Jesus said a lot about it.

Releasing more into Ministry and Missions

Second, can you imagine what could happen if we as members of Christ Church let alone the wider Parish of St John's and the Church in Cape Town, were gripped by the radical life of open-handed liberality that Jesus taught. Imagine if we really tasted the freedom from fear and greed that Jesus bought with his own blood ... there would be an avalanche of ministry and missions and acts of mercy!

Another Warehouse, or two or three launched this year.

More church planting, more young people sent off to Uganda, Namibia, Limpopo, Niger, ...

I thought as I was preparing this should I actually say this. Am I not just creating more work for myself. Would it not be better to just let things tick over gently, Duncan.

I want to let you know – I am up for it. I don't mind hard work. Bring it on!

So the second reason for talking about this is that God can release an avalanche of ministry and mission.

Giving People Are the Happiest People on Earth

Thirdly the reason for speaking about this is, if we are personally were set free to give the way the New Testament talks about giving, we would be the happiest people on earth.

Proverbs 14:21, "Happy are those who are kind to the needy."

Proverbs 22:9, "The generous will be blessed."

1 Timothy 6:9, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."

Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

As Pastor of Christ Church I long that our young people would learn quickly, and our older people would learn before it is too late, that there is no positive correlation between having many things and being happy.

A life of simplicity that curtails spending on self and is matched by a passion to advance the kingdom through giving, will be a far happier life and far more fulfilled life, than a life of indulgence and luxury.

So for these three reasons I am happy to speak on money and giving.

- 1) It's puts me in good company;
- 2) it could, God-willing, release an avalanche of ministry and missions; and,
- 3) if you embrace the call, it will make you happier than all the wealth and luxury in the world.

Three Imperatives

In Matthew 6:19-34 there are three main imperatives, three commands – very happy commands. Everything else is meant to help you see the commands as wise and right and joyfully possible. The three commands are

1) "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"

found in verse 20 (I am lumping the negative command, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth," together with this one as a negative way of saying the same thing).

2) "Do not be anxious,"

found three times.

Verse 25: "Do not be anxious about your life."

Verse 31: "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"

Verse 34: "Do not be anxious about tomorrow."

3) "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"

found in verse 33.

How do these imperatives relate to each other?

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" is the large, overarching command – be passionate about experiencing the saving, purifying, empowering, love-producing, reign of God in your life and over all the world.

It is praying the prayer Charlotte looked at last Sunday *"Your kingdom come!"* – in my life, in our country, in the nations of Africa, in the world.

This series is looking at Kingdom values.

Then *"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"* is a specific instance of what seeking God's kingdom involves. Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness involves not trying to be rich on earth but trying to be rich in heaven, that is, rich in God.

Then *"Do not be anxious"* is the condition of the heart by which we break free from our addiction to earth-treasure and give ourselves with passion to heaven-treasure.

Those are the three main imperatives in the text. That is what Jesus teaches us as we sit at his feet as it were and listen to his instructions to his disciples. His heart for us is that we be free from anxiety, seeking his kingdom, laying up treasure in heaven and not on earth.

So what does it mean to lay up treasure in heaven?

Jesus is saying that there are two ways to live: you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things on earth, or you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things in heaven.

Jesus says: the mark of those who follow him as his disciples is that their eyes are on heaven, their orientation is towards heaven, and that their behaviour is assessed in that light.

Questions help us sharpen our focus. We do this all the time.

- We ask when making a purchase – is this good value for money?
- When managing a junior colleague we ask – are you using your time most effectively?
- When planning a holiday we ask – is this the best way to spend my leave time, will it restore and renew me?

The question Jesus wants us to ask as we consider the use of the money and resources we have is – is this a choice for heaven or for earth?

He says very clearly that it can't be both. You have to choose between them. That's the point of verse 24:

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

So the question to ask as we make a financial decision is who is the master in this one?

Either we are mastered by money and therefore ignore God, or we are mastered by God and make money a servant of the kingdom.

But let's be more specific. What does Jesus mean "devote your life to accumulating treasure in heaven" – what is the main thing he has in mind that we should do now? It is clear from the context that it is giving rather than accumulating. If laying up treasures in heaven is the opposite of laying up

treasures on earth, then probably laying up treasures in heaven will be NOT laying up treasures on earth but giving them away in ways that magnify the worth of Jesus.

There are several other teachings of Jesus that confirm this meaning: laying up treasures in heaven is giving money away for Christ's sake rather than accumulating it.

For example, consider Luke 12:32-33,

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."

Here Jesus explains how you *"provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old"* and how you *"provide yourselves with treasure in the heavens that does not fail,"* namely, *"Sell your possessions and give to the needy."* That's how you do it.

In other words, possessions on earth are not for accumulating, they are for distributing in ways that Christ is honoured and our joy in heaven is increased. When we give – especially when we give so generously that we have to sell something to have anything to give – we show that Jesus is our treasure and that we love others more than we love our own security and comfort.

Randy Alcorn, in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, says,
"I'm convinced that the greatest deterrent to giving is this: the illusion that earth is our home" (p. 44).
It's not; Christ is our home.

Paul writes to the Colossians 3:1-3

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

And in a moment we are coming to be reminded of that again as we share in Holy Communion. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. We are coming to take to our selves the precious body and blood of Jesus – that he may dwell

in us and we in him. He gave his all for us. He laid his life for us. He gave his all for us. The way we use our money expresses our hearts.

We are approaching our Dedication Sunday when we renew our commitment to God for this year and members of Christ Church.

If you count Christ Church as your spiritual home I ask you to see your pledge to support the ministry and mission outreach of this church as one way (not the only way) in which you can be laying up treasures in heaven.

Having laid this all out Jesus then speaks directly into the condition of the heart by which we break free from our addiction to earth-treasure and give ourselves with passion to heaven-treasure.

He says do not be anxious.

Now that is a hard command to obey. Because if you are anxious that is how you are, and being told not to be, does not help much.

But let God the Holy Spirit remind you of just how much the Father loves you. Let him remind you that he knows your needs. And hear again the invitation to regain your perspective as you seek first the kingdom of God and put your heart and resources in the place where thieves can not break in and steal and moth can not destroy – put your all in the hands of him who knows and loves you and has give his all for you and me.

Amen.

(Note: I have made extensive use of material by John Piper. All credit and thanks to him)