

## Being a follower of Jesus in the way we handle money

**[Please note these are unedited preaching notes and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]**

Matthew 17:24-27, Mark 12:13-17,

7pm/cck/08/02/09

---

Two Sundays back I shared with you the vision we have at Christ Church of growing maturing disciples who are growing maturing disciples.

I gave you in broad outline the six distinct areas of life which Jesus taught about and gave a living example of what it meant. So ...

- We see Jesus praying, and we listen to his teaching on the life of close intimacy with God.
- We see Jesus facing temptation and battling with Satan in the wilderness, and listen to his teaching on the importance of a pure heart and being holy in word and action and motive.
- We see Jesus ministering in great power, and we listen to his teaching on comfort, wisdom and strength that comes from the Holy Spirit.
- We see Jesus helping the sick and the needy, and we listen to his teaching on the importance of caring for our neighbours, the poor the sick, those in need.
- We see Jesus proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and we listen to him reading from the Scriptures.
- We see Jesus integrating the sacred and secular while observing the ceremonies of his faith.

It is this last dimension of being a follower of Jesus that we are focussing on at the moment - how Jesus integrate the sacred and secular – the physical and spiritual. How his life of intimacy with the Father was expressed in the every day stuff of life? How he walked the talk.

Last week Jeremy preached an excellent sermon about being a follower of Jesus in our families. Tonight I want to look at some aspects of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the way we handle money.

I was reflecting on how I handle money – my interaction with money is largely as I sit at my computer. I download statements and make internet transfers. I type figures in and hit enter, and then hit enter again when I am asked if I am sure.

But those figures on the screen represent money – they represent physical stuff. For me my income is as result of your giving. You change figures on your computer screen and hit enter twice and the figures changed in the Christ Church account. And Christ Church transfers money to the Parish account and the Parish transfers money into my account deducting a cut on the way which goes to Mr. Manuel's account which he then passes onto others who pass it on to others who fix the traffic lights and build schools and buy Corvettes and a whole host of others things. And we will come back to tax in a moment.

But I then look at the figures on my screen and make changes to them and hit enter and couple of times and those figures are turned into cell phone conversations with people, and into petrol that enables me to travel to see people, and into food that I share with my family and friends, and into news papers I read and gifts that I give to others etc. ... all very physical earthy stuff.

Although it is just figures on a screen, those figures represent very earthy physical stuff.

And, here is the point. The central doctrine we celebrate at Christmas is that God became incarnate – God became flesh and blood. He came and lived amongst us. The God entered the physical world – the world of food and houses, wages and debts, taxes and tithes, ...

So money and how we handle it is of vital importance for us as we seek to grow as maturing followers of Jesus.

Now I am very aware that as I preach on this subject tonight, I am aware that a lot of you know a whole lot about how to handle to money. You are not inexperienced. The fact that you own what you do, have the education that you do are testimony to the fact that you do know something about money. I am also aware that you are praying people. You are followers of Jesus. So you have learned how to handle money as a Christian.

The question I ask you to consider is, do you think there is something more God wants to teach you as we seek to grow as maturing followers of Jesus?

Our vision as a church is that we are growing as maturing disciples of Jesus. So ask God in what way he wants you to grow and mature in this aspect of being a follower of Jesus.

I find in this regard that there are two helpful questions to ask as we seek grow as disciples of Jesus.

What did Jesus do?

What did Jesus teach?

As I come to preach on this subject of following Jesus in the way we handle money I ask these two questions.

- **How did Jesus handle money?**
- **What did Jesus teach about we should handle money?**

The answer to the second question is “quite a lot”. Jesus spoke and taught a great deal about money. And in the time I have tonight I won’t be able to get into that.

So lets just stay with the first question ...

### **What do we see Jesus doing in the way he handled money?**

Can you think of instances in the Gospel where Jesus handled money?

There are not many instances in the Gospels where Jesus dealt with money directly. But there are two that are significant so lets look at these.

### ***Paying the Imperial tax to Caesar***

**(Matthew 22:15-22 also Mark 12:13ff and Luke 20:21-26)**

*<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. <sup>16</sup>They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who*

they are. <sup>17</sup>Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

<sup>18</sup>But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? <sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, <sup>20</sup>and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

<sup>21</sup>"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

<sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

### **What is going on here?**

This is a trick question set to try and trap Jesus by this unholy alliance of the Sadducees and the Herodians. Would Jesus show himself to be a sell out and advising complicity with the Roman authorities, or would he advocate rebellion and give support to a tax boycott?

Do you notice that word "trap" that comes up in verse 15 and in verse 18?

It is actually a different word in the Greek.

In verse 15 it is a word which conveys the sense of *trap to ensnare*.

In verse 18 when Jesus uses the word it is a word that conveys the sense of *testing or temptation*.

It is the same word used in Matthew 4 verse one where we read that Jesus was lead into the desert and was *tempted by the devil*.

Jesus saw the what was happening behind the scenes. This was not a comfortable academic debate between scholars. It was not even a political enticement. No, he could see that the old wily enemy he had confronted in the wilderness was operative here.

### **So that is the first thing for us to note.**

Money very often is an area of temptation. A temptation is subtle and not always recognised for what it is. Treating money and discussion about money as an academic exercise is dangerous. We will find ourselves caught into stuff and fighting a enemy we can't see and whose tactics have blinded us to what is actually going on.

So if we want to follow Jesus in the way he handled money – lesson number one –

### **(1) Recognise that money is an area of testing and temptation.**

It is not spiritually neutral territory. The enemy is lurking around looking to ensnare us.

We need to put on the whole armour of Christ when we deal with money because it is a battle ground.

Moving on – Jesus confounds them with his answer.

*“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”*

His answers points to the deeper significance of what is going on.

Note he says give back to Caesar ...

Caesar had the coins made. They had his image printed on them. Give them back to him.

But who made you? Whose image is printed on you?  
Give to God what he made.

**So lessons number two we get as we look at Jesus example –**

### **(2) Don’t allow money to define you.**

The point is this: You are not defined by what you have, but by who made you and by whose you are. By whom you have given yourself to.

That is the truth we see Jesus operating out of when it comes to money. Money did not define him. It did not give him value. It did not tell him who he was. It did not tell him to whom he belonged.

He allowed the Father to tell him who he was. At his baptism the voice from spoke and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove.

*“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”*

On the Mount of Transfiguration as he began his journey to Jerusalem and the cross the Father spoke and said ...

*“This is my son with whom I am well pleased”*

In the Garden of Gethsemane when he was right in the midst of the agonising decision to go the way of obedience he cries

*“Abba Father”.*

When he dies – he calls out ...

*“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”.*

All through his life and at critical moments in his ministry Jesus allowed his relationship with the father to tell him who he was – not money.

OK – so there is a something we need to do if we want to grow as followers of Jesus.

God wants to teach us who he is through our money. He wants us to move beyond the temptation of allowing money to define us and allow him to tell us who we are.

Let me ask this – have your financial circumstances changed recently?

Have you found yourself with less than you had before?

Has your income dropped – unemployed, rising costs and no increase in income, redundancy, less profits in your business, ...

Have you found yourself with more than you had before?

Unexpected profits, gifts received, a new job, your first job, ...

There is a temptation in both instances to allow that change in income to define you.

Resist it! You are no more or no less valuable to Jesus than you were before.

Don't let money define you.

**A third lesson we take from this encounter is this ... its obvious.**

### **(3) Pay your tax.**

It is not recorded that Jesus paid tax to Caesar, but he certainly endorses the practice of paying tax.

This is a huge subject that warrants a sermon on it own, but suffice it to say in God's economy civil government has a responsibility to provide for its citizens and they have a responsibility to pay taxes to the civil authority to enable them to do that.

So lets simply note that as the tax year comes to a close and deadlines loom that in paying tax and doing it well and properly and on time is what followers of Jesus should do.

**What other passages are there where Jesus handles money?**

### ***Paying the Temple Tax***

**(Matthew 17:24ff)**

*<sup>24</sup>After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"*

*<sup>25</sup>"Yes, he does," he replied.*

*When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?"*

*<sup>26</sup>"From others," Peter answered.*

*"Then the children are exempt," Jesus said to him. <sup>27</sup>"But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."*

### ***What is going on here?***

Well here it is also a tax matter but in this instance it is the temple tax. This did not have the force of Roman law but it was sort of expected that Jewish men between 20 and 50 would pay their annual contribution of two drachma to keep the Temple going.

Peter defends Jesus when they arrive in Capernaum and the question is put to him – does Jesus pay the Temple Tax?

In the conversation that Jesus initiates with Peter once they are alone he makes it clear that just as royal sons of a king are exempt from paying the taxes their father imposes on his subjects, in the same way Jesus as his Father's Son is exempt from paying the Temple Tax. And what's more, Jesus implicitly frees his followers from paying the Temple tax because they too are royal sons of the Father.

**But what is the deeper significance of what is happening here?**

Was Jesus against the Temple? Not at all. He calls it his Father's House. He clears out the money changers.

The underlying point here is this ...

**(4) God is not a taker. God is a giver.**

God is a giving God. God does not tax his children.

God does not want our money. God is not looking to amass followers so he can swell his coffers.

**God is a giver not a taker.**

Now I wonder to what extent we believe that God is taker.

To what extent do we believe that God wants to take things from us, starting with our money?

Let me ask you this ...

Do you believe that God does not really have your best interests at heart?

Do you believe that God really is not concerned about your retirement and that he does not have your long-term interest at heart?

Do you believe that God wants to withhold goodness from you?

That is a lie. It is a lie we have to actively counter.

And as we approach our Dedication Sunday it is vital that we understand this, because if we believe that lie about God we will believe it about the church as well. We will see the church as a taker.

As the Minister in Charge of Christ Church I want to counter that belief with every fibre in my body.

I don't want you to ever get the message that we as a church want to take your money. I don't want to take you money.

What I want is for us to be imitators of God.

God is a giver. To follow him we need to give.

Paul writes of Jesus ... (Phil 2:5ff)

*Have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:  
 6Who, being in very nature God,  
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to  
 his own advantage; 7rather, he made himself nothing  
 by taking the very nature of a servant...*

Mathew 20:28

*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...*

John 3:16

*God so loved the world that he gave ...*

As Paul writes to the Corinthians about giving you can hear how what he says comes from this place of wanting the followers of Jesus in Corinth to be imitators of God, to be generous like God.

2 Cor 9:6ff

*6Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

*(God wants you to give cheerfully because he gives cheerfully)*

*8And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9As it is written:*

*“They have scattered abroad their gifts to the poor;*

*their righteousness endures forever.”<sup>9</sup>*

*<sup>10</sup>Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup>You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

God is a giver. We need to fashion our attitude and actions on God and be givers. That is what we see coming through in the way Jesus handled money.

**Last point. What we see in this incident is that ...**

### **(5) God is a God who provides.**

Isn't this an amazing miracle? God provides. He provides amazingly. The first fish Peter pulls from the water has a four drachma coin in its mouth. Not two or a ten or a five! A four drachma coin. No more and no less than was needed.

One of the things we felt God saying to us as we prayed about money and Christ Church was that we need to remember that God is a God of provision.

#### **Caroline's Story of the Warehouse Vehicle ...**

Just look at this provision of a vehicle for the Warehouse Ministry. It was not in the budget. It was not part of the balance sheet. But it was a need that was prayed about and brought to God. He provided.

We look at the budget and balance sheet. God looks at providing what is needed. God does money differently to the way do.

Now I ask this in the light of what is happening in the world markets and biggest national economies managed by the best brains and economic minds in the world – do you think we know more about money than God?

Do we understand how money works better than God?

Do we have to understand and grasp the whole picture and have handle on the whole thing before we give? Before we imitate God?

Not at all.

That is another lie we need to knock on the head. We don't have to understand all the implications and why for and where fors about money before we give.

All we need to understand is this. God is a giver. God is a provider. We need to imitate God. Be like God.