

# **“Why Do We Have to Talk About Money?”**

**A Discussion on Stewardship**  
**Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 6:46-49**  
**November 16, 2008**

Why do we have to talk about money? I've heard that question all my life, both from outside and inside the church. All they ever talk about is money. All they are interested in is money? And over the years, I have found myself reticent to talk about money very much. I talk about commitment and stewardship, about using all the resources we have been given and money is a part of that. But we do need to talk about money. Jesus talked about money, and the way we use money, quite a bit. It is the most prominent topic in the parables. And it is one of the things that got him into trouble.

Somehow we have developed this picture of a Jesus who never causes any disruption or discomfort in the lives of the people. But the scriptures tell us that Jesus was always confronting and challenging others. To the woman at the well he said, *"You've had five husbands and now you are living with someone else. It is time for your lifestyle to change."* To the woman caught in adultery he said, *"You are forgiven but now you have to change."* And when the rich young ruler asked him about how he could inherit eternal life, Jesus said to him, *"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* Jesus understood that a lot of hard work might have gone into building that man's fortune, but now he was asking him to do something even harder, to give it all away. Jesus talked about change; he challenged people over issues of commitment and stewardship; and he talked about money a lot.

But why do we have to talk about money? The very question cracks me up because everyone everywhere is always talking about money. Go to a football game and the very first thing anyone says is about money. That will be ... Congress brings in oil executives and financial people to talk about how much money they make. Governments talk about taxing and spending, school boards about costs and millage rates, unions talk about wages and benefits, and it is all about money. Pro athletes will stop playing if they think that management is not giving them the respect they deserve. But what they are really saying is, "Give me more money!" We get junk mail that is constantly asking for money for a service or a product. My greatest source of junk mail is from those who want to give me money, loans and credit cards. Businesses exist for one purpose - to get money. They talk about money all the time. But still this question comes, "Why do we have to talk about money?" There are a number of reasons.

## **1. WE GIVE MONEY AS PART OF GIVING THANKS**

The idea of tithing, that is, giving one tenth of all we have received started 4000 years ago. Some kings decided that they wanted what other kings had so they went out to conquer and rob their neighbors. It happened all the time, and still does. But in this raid, Lot, the nephew of Abraham was captured and taken to be sold into slavery. Abraham heard about it, and with his hired hands, went to get Lot back. Lot was a bum, but he was family. When the battle was over, Lot rescued the victory won, Abraham freely gave one tenth of all he received, to the high priest of the Lord. The story is found in Genesis 14, *"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram ... Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."* We talk about money because giving money is part of a very ancient tradition in our faith of showing

thanks to God for the victories we experience in life, particularly the victory over slavery to sin and death.

## 2. WE HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO GIVE 10% OF EVERYTHING

From the days of Moses, people were told to give 10% of all they produced for the administration of the sacrifices and rituals of faith. The Lord made this abundantly clear when he said through the prophet Malachi, *"In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse, the whole nation of you, because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.@"* And then he added: *A Test me in this,@" says the LORD Almighty, A and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.@"*

The Lord told us to give one tenth of all we receive for the administration of the church, and in truth, the offerings don't stop there. We are also told to bring one tenth every three years for missions, for caring for those who find themselves living in hard times. And then there is another tenth to be given every three years for celebration banquets, for covered dish suppers in the house of the Lord. We find that in Deuteronomy 14. Some may say that all that is in the Old Testament and we are freed from those laws. True, but the standard in the New Testament is quite a bit tougher. Jesus said, *"If you want to live in perfect love, give everything."*

Some don't want to tithe to God and are content to merely tip the Lord. You can do that, but keep in mind that the standard tip is 15%. So go ahead and tip God if you wish, but the standard is a tithe, 10%. And the leaders of this church and our employees, including me, need to lead the way on that. I know of several UM churches, growing churches, where tithing, daily prayer, weekly service, and worship attendance at least three weeks out of the month is a prerequisite for holding an office in the church. The idea is simple. If we want to make decisions for the church, we need to be fully committed to the church, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that includes our money.

## 3. GIVING IS PART OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

When Christianity was in infancy, there was a huge debate over whether we have to practice Judaism; do we have to keep the law in order to be a Christian? A conference was held in Jerusalem to settle the issue. It's found in Acts 15, and Paul, one of the major participants, also wrote about it in Galatians 2. There was some disagreement between the authors as to the specifics of the final decision, but in Galatians we read, *"They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.@"* Paul was clear that he needed to keep collecting for the poor, particularly the poor in Jerusalem. We are expected to give.

In 2 Corinthians we see Paul making arrangements to collect an offering from the people in Corinth. He told them that he had been bragging about the generous gift that would come out of Corinth and now was the time to act. He talked about the embarrassment, individually and collectively, if he were to return to Jerusalem empty handed. You see, at the heart of Christianity is the call to deny oneself. When we do that, greed and selfishness can no longer be a part of us. We can learn to give with joy and the Lord loves a cheerful giver. And in that same chapter Paul reminds us of the teachings of

Jesus, that we reap that which we sow, and by the standard we give, so shall we be given. Giving is a big part of our tradition.

#### 4. GOOD STEWARDSHIP IS USING ALL THE TOOLS GOD HAS GIVEN US

We are called to use all the tools we have been given, to invest them in faith for the Lord. As a church we use the tools of our time and talents, of this facility to find ways to reach out to tell the world, to show the world the good news that Jesus died for us that we might live. Understand that each and every one of us deserves to die for all the times that we separated ourselves from God; separated ourselves from the Source and Creator of life. But Jesus, who did not deserve death, willingly took our place that we might live. That is the message that we need to hear, and the message we need to tell to Manchester, and to all the world.

In many churches people go overboard in their desire to preserve the building as though it were a museum of faith. We worry that wear and tear, that destruction will somehow dishonor those who have given so much to make this place what it is. But the truth is that over the years people have given donations of time, prayer, service, and money to spread the gospel of God. Not to honor themselves with a building or a plaque, but to help God's kingdom expand and grow. This place is simply a tool that we need to use to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Bill Easum, a well known church consultant, has said that the purpose of the trustees is not to preserve the building, but to see that this place, that these things are properly destroyed in mission and ministry.

Before you get too shook up about that statement remember that when the disciples were ooh'ing and ah'ing over the beauties of the Temple, Jesus said, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.*" We know that was a reference to his resurrection. But it also means that our business is not in stone and wood, brick and mortar. No! Our business is in flesh and blood, in the hearts and souls of humanity. When I hear that carpet is worn or the walls are dirty my first response is, "Isn't that terrific?" We are using the place to touch the hearts and lives of people. @ This building is a tool that we need to use in ministry. It is simply a great big hammer and screwdriver that we have at our disposal so we can continue to build the kingdom of God in the heart of this community. That's why we need to talk about money.

#### 5. WE GIVE SO LIVES CAN BE CHANGED

That really gets to the point of it. What we do here changes lives. We change lives with programs like Youth Fellowship, a program that brings young people together in the presence of Christ, and that changes lives for the better. We change lives through Bible Study, Sunday School, and church camp. This congregation certainly knows the power and the importance of church camp. We change lives by reaching out to help people in need through the Angel Food and the Clothing Bank and Sunbeam Station. We change lives by working with Helping Hands, through work camps and Habitat for Humanity. We change lives through the Community Family Fun Fest. We are trying to change lives, and we will continue to try, to even expand our efforts by showing those we know and even those we don't know the love of God in very practical ways.

Of course Jesus told a whole parable about that. For there will be a time when all peoples and nations

shall be gathered before the Lord. Some will be condemned because of the lack of compassionate acts within their lives. But others, to their great surprise, will be rewarded for reaching out to those in need. And when they asked about the rewards they were given, we read the response in Matthew 25: *“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”*

People both within and without our congregation have come here to try to find some answers, some healing, some help, some hope. Those who have been abused by a cold, uncaring world have turned to the church to find comfort, warmth, and light. And when we have been at our best, we have helped them grow in a loving relationship with Jesus, to help them develop a living faith. We have been told that if we are to call ourselves Christian we have a responsibility to reach out to the hungry and naked, the homeless and the hurting, the helpless and the hopeless. To do that, we need to talk about money.

#### 6. WE GIVE TO MAKE DISCIPLES

The final instructions of Jesus were quite clear, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* We are not told to sit in here and wait for people to come. We are not just to be seen by the world. We are to be pro-active in the world. To go forth into all the world to make disciples, baptizing them, that means immersing them in a committed relationship with God the Father and Jesus the Son. We try to take that seriously, and we have had some measure of success. But there are within us hopes and dreams of what this church can become. Burning within hearts and souls is the vision a 24-7 church that grows in number and spirit daily and weekly. We can be the light of grace shining into a dark and dreary world. We can bring thousands into a relationship with God, but it takes commitment. It requires us to wisely use all the resources we have at hand. That means our time, our energy, our wisdom, our intelligence, our building, and our service. That means that we have to talk about money and decide out of our commitment, out of our faith what portion we will offer in service and grace to God.

#### 7. WE GIVE TO TEST BOTH OURSELVES AND GOD

The Lord said, *“Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. For you shall reap what you sow.”* What harvest do you want to reap? We need to know because it is time to sow, and its time to grow our mission and our ministry. And that means that we have to talk about money. What percentage of your income are you giving back to God? In the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church the average giving is between 2.2% and 2.4% while the standard remains at 10%. Some give far more. And many give nothing. But there is a correlation between the faith we live and gifts we give. I will not ask you to automatically give 10% if you are not close to that now. If you are giving 5%, move it to 6%. If you’re giving 2, kick it up to 3. And if you are giving nothing, then begin to give something because the Lord has certainly given to you. But I will ask you to move closer to the Lord, and to give accordingly, increasing one percent at a time until that goal is reached. For when we give, it is a sign and a symbol of thanksgiving. It is traditional. It is commanded. It changes lives. It helps to build God’s kingdom in our midst. Rarely does anyone in the church want to talk about money, yet it is necessary to do so. So when we talk about giving, tithing, and money, may we speak with generosity and faith that the harvest may be great. May we grow in Spirit. May we grow in number. May we be

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builders in the glorious kingdom of God. And may we see the blessings of the Lord poured out on our congregation; poured out in the midst of our lives. In your life, may it be so. And may you give accordingly. Amen.