

Stewardship of money **Leviticus 27.30-33; Matthew 6.19-26**

Last Sunday, in the third week of our stewardship month, we thought about how we might steward our time and talents – how we might “invest” our time and talents in loving God and loving neighbour - and so produce a “return” for God.

Today we come to our stewardship of our money, or financial resources.

Now at the outset, perhaps we should admit that this is not going to be an easy topic for me to preach on, or for you to listen to.

We are British...and very respectable...and respectable British people do not talk about politics, religion, sex or money.

But of course, Jesus was neither British, nor by our standards very respectable! And he had a lot to say about all of these topics!

So, as begin to consider this topic of our use of money, perhaps we might ask the question why was Jesus so vulgar as to speak so often about money?

Well, I wonder if the first reason was because he knew that money has the ability, more than many other things, to deeply affect our spiritual life.

Matthew 6.24, from today’s Gospel reading: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

You see, there is not enough room in a human heart for love of God and love of money.

And when we start to trust our wealth for our pleasure or future security, then we begin to let slip our trust in God.

This we see played out in Jesus’ exchange with the rich young ruler. Jesus knew how important his money was to him and so to free him from it and to teach him trust in God, Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor. Sadly he could not bring himself to do it.

So, on the one hand Jesus spoke much about money because he knew it could be the enemy of our souls.

But on the other hand, Jesus spoke much about money because he knew that in the right use of money there is much to be gained.

Matthew 6.19-20:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

We all love a good investment don't we, whether it's a stock that's about to rocket, a sure thing in the 2.30pm at Newmarket, a good education for our kids or a bargain in the sales?

We are only too happy to part with our money if we think we are going to get a good return on it.

In investing our money in the work of God's kingdom, we have the chance to invest in something of eternal worth – the growth of God's kingdom here on earth and people being able to enter into God's completed kingdom at Jesus' return.

My granddad, who had a few funny phrases, used to say that there are no rich men in a cemetery.

And its true, isn't it, that when we die, we can't take any of our money with us.

But we can send it on ahead! By investing in God's kingdom now, we will see the results of our investment in the new heaven and the new earth.

I love to think that some of my giving, especially to missionary organisations, will have the effect of someone hearing about Jesus, putting their faith and trust in him and so going to heaven; and just maybe when I meet them in heaven, that person will say, “thank you for making it possible for me to be here with you today.”

So, I wonder if we might now spend a few minutes pondering some of the principles we might apply when we think of how we spend (invest) our money.

Principle 1:

All that we have, money, wealth, possessions, aren't ours anyway, but God's.

Just as we steward the creation on behalf of the God who made it, just as we use our time and talents for the God who gave them to us, so we have to acknowledge that all we own is a gift from God...and we are responsible to him for how we use it.

One day we will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ and have to give an account for what we have done with what he entrusted to us.

Principle 2:

We should therefore use all our money in a way that is honouring to God. It's not that we can decide how much to give to God and then do what we like with the rest.

No, if it's all God's really, then we should be aiming to please God in every area of our budgeting; from the money we spend on housing our families to the money we spend on our holidays.

Principle 3:

Some of our money should be specifically given to God's work in and through his Church.

As we read in our Leviticus reading this morning, God's people in the Old Testament were legally required to give a tithe, 10%, of their income, to God.

Now we could argue about whether this law from the Old Testament applies to us in New Testament times or not; some Old Testament laws (the ceremonial ones) no longer apply today, but the moral ones do. Which category does this one fall into?

But my take on it is this: if God's people in the Old Testament, before they had experienced God's grace in Jesus Christ gave 10%, then how can I who have experienced the fullness of God's love in Jesus give any less?

Hence, once we have completed our tax returns for the year, Helen and I take 10% of our income (after tax) and give it to whichever churches we happen to worship in.

The Church of England suggests we give 5% to our local church and 5% to other charitable causes.

Dare I suggest that for some people, 10% will be a minimum?

Many Christians have worked on the principle of working out how much money they need to live on and then given away the rest. As their income rose, they could give away more.

Principle 4:

Christian giving should be planned, generous and joyful.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, Paul sets out these principles for the Church in Corinth as he writes to them about a collection he is taking.

I'm tempted to say that if you can't give to God in this way, it's better not to give at all! Money given to God haphazardly, grudgingly and miserably is not very honouring to God and reaps no benefit for our souls.

But at least as we get going, and as we learn to do better, it may be that we have to force ourselves, even against our will to do what we know is right.

As an athlete must go through the pain barrier to improve, so might we need to too.

Next week is Stewardship Sunday.

Alan Strachan, our Diocesan Stewardship advisor will address us, and speak to us more specifically about giving of our time, talents and money to God.

What he will say to us is important.

And how we respond will be important too.

Let me end with a story.

The pastor John Wimber was met at the church door after the Sunday morning service by a very cross parishioner.

“I’ve been trying to get through to the church office all weekend” the parishioner said, “and there was no answer! I came across this homeless person and really felt that the church needed to do something for them! In the end I had to put them up myself! Don’t you think the church should be doing something for people like that?”

And John Wimber looked at the parishioner and said, “Well it looks like the church did!”

It’s easy for us to say, “The church should do this, or do that”. But in the end, we are the church.

What are we going to do about it?