

JESUS and MONEY

We are so blessed here, aren't we? God has provided us with the most beautiful of environments in which to live. We have nice homes, people who love us, enough to eat, and we live without the threat of war & violence hanging over our head.

As a church we are also blessed. We are not only meeting our commitments as a parish, but through the generosity of our parishioners, we are able to support a number of projects, such as sponsoring a Christian radio station, putting in a new kitchen, and with some extra help from the IMB, creating an outdoor playground for our young families ministry.

We really are very wealthy when you think about it.

But even so, many of us in the western world want more.

When I was growing up, my parents always bought a weekly lotto ticket. One of my boys does the same thing. It's an excuse to daydream and make plans about how winning that money would make all their dreams come true.

Money is such a powerful thing, isn't it? Jesus rightly said that the love of money is the root of all evil. Not money itself – money is a necessary part of our society. But the love of money can consume us, and like the two brothers in today's parable, can be the root of all sorts of family rifts and broken relationships. It is the root of the major evils in our world – crooked politics, drug running, child pornography, prostitution, weapons trading, theft, murder – wars; so many of the problems today are triggered by the love of money.

Did you know, that 16 of the 38 parables Jesus told are about money? That one in every ten verses of the Gospels deals with money? That the Bible offers some 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2000 verses on money and possessions? You cannot be a Biblical Christian, and avoid talking about possessions and money.

In today's reading a man came to Jesus and wanted him to order his brother to give him a share of the family inheritance. The love of money was causing a family disagreement.

Jesus took the situation, and used it to teach the crowd about greed, and how dangerous wrong priorities over money could be.

“Watch out!” he said. “Be on your guard against greed. There's more to life than how much money you have!”

And he went on to tell them a story. A rich man's farm did really well one year - so well, his barns were stuffed to overflowing.

Two things to note –

First, this guy was ALREADY rich – which meant in God's eyes, he had a greater responsibility to provide for the poor.

Secondly, on top of his wealth, he had a bumper year – his barns were stuffed to overflowing. Did he share his ever-increasing wealth? No way. He was going to make a way to keep it all for himself, sit back and take life easy.

Jesus made a very strong point after this simple story. This guy was such a FOOL! He put all his energy into amassing wealth that in the eternal scheme of things, would do him absolutely no good. God called him to account. "Time's up!" said God. All this guy's earthly riches slipped from his grasp, and his very life was taken from him.

Jesus finished with a warning – make sure you get your priorities right. Seek to be rich towards God – not in the things of this world. Because the riches of this world are so finite and fleeting.

So how should we respond to this very strongly worded story?

- **First –we need to remember that all wealth is God's in the first place.**

We so easily forget, though. We talk about my stuff - my house, my car, my money....

But none of us could live, even for a second, on this planet if God didn't abundantly share His wealth with us. *"The earth is the LORD's and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him."* (Ps 24:1-2)

If we can grasp the truth of that verse, being generous towards others ceases to be a problem for us. Instead of clutching tightly to our wallets, needing to amass wealth and possessions for ourselves like the farmer in the story, we are able to say to God – Lord, this is YOURS anyway. You're so generous towards me. How do YOU want me to allocate it?

If then, God asks us to give to a particular cause, support a missionary, a church, a charity – we can trust God to provide for our own needs.

There was a Baptist pastor, a Jewish Rabbi and an Irish priest who were talking about their giving. The Baptist pastor said with some pride, "Oh, I believe in the principle of tithing. I give 10% of my income to the Lord. The Jewish Rabbi looked a little disapproving and said, "In my faith, 10% is the minimum! We also give a portion of our produce, and anything else we bring in." The Irish priest looked at them both with disdain and said, "Well, every week I take my entire earnings, I

throw it up into the air and pray – God you take whatever you want, and I’ll make do with the rest.”

I wonder if we could be brave enough to change what we pray in relation to giving. Instead of saying, “Lord, how much should I give?” could we pray, “Lord, how much should I keep?”

- **The second way we can respond to this parable is by heeding Jesus’ advice to seek to be “Rich towards God.”**

How can we be “Rich towards God”? The secret, I think is in holding loosely to the things we see that we “own” – money and possessions. And then, just as importantly, seeking God, as to how he wants us to use what he has given us. Not just time and talents, but money as well.

Remember Jesus words in Matthew 6? *“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal.”*²⁰ *Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves.*²¹ *Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.*

When we can let go of the riches we consider ‘ours’ and instead live in a spirit of generosity & sharing, we become unencumbered by the restrictions that holding on to our wealth can bring. We find that if God presents us with a need, our first response is to help, rather than to clutch tightly to our purse strings. When we respond in love & generosity, God is pleased. We are storing up treasures in heaven.

Perhaps for some of us, it may have been some time since we have re-assessed where we give and what we give. Maybe we’re still giving the same amount today that we were giving five years ago or ten years ago. Perhaps it’s a scary thought, to think God may ask us to change that. But remember this promise from Hebrews:

Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never forsake you.” (Heb 13:5)

God is the only real source of all security. We are his children. Our safety and security is not in the size of our bank accounts, our houses, or anything else on this earth. Our safety and security rests in the fact that each of us is a child of the King. If we hold lightly to our material wealth, and are happy for it to come and go at God’s bidding, we can be assured that he will never fail us.

- **Lastly this parable reminds us that we are accountable to God for our wealth.** We will face God, and be called to account for the way we have handled what he has entrusted to us. Our accountability before God is spelt out more clearly in another parable, about three servants who were given funds to take

care of in their master's absence. Two of them increased the amount, but one was scared and just buried it in the ground. When the master returned, he was angry with the third servant because he hadn't even bothered to put the money in the bank where it would gain interest. The master took the money from the lazy servant and gave it to the one who had used his master's wealth most wisely.

The point of that story being that we need to use wisely the material wealth that God entrusts to us. We need to ensure that it reaps benefit for us in heaven. God will not be pleased with those of us who have sought only to use our wealth for ourselves.

So – there are three things we can remember:

- All wealth is God's in the first place and remains God's – we are merely caretakers
- We should seek to be rich towards God, not rich in material things
- We will be held accountable for the way we have managed the wealth that God has entrusted to us.

To finish on a positive note, listen to these words of Jesus from Mat. 6:38

“³⁸ If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.”

No matter how much we give – we'll never out give God. It will return to us in full measure, absolutely overflowing! Not necessarily materially, or even this side of heaven – but we will always be blessed.

Let's pray.