

Focus on STEWARDSHIP

Deuteronomy 8:11-18, Matthew 6:19-21 [MW17-34]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai + Wellsford, Sunday 12 November 2017

A simple rule for investing, from Will Rogers:

Don't gamble. Take all your savings and buy some good stock and hold it until it goes up, then sell it. If it don't go up, don't buy it.

Jesus and Finance:

Jesus talked a great deal about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions.

Jesus cuts right to the chase when he says in this morning's Gospel reading

- store up your treasure in heaven
for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also
- and the bottom line as Jesus sees it is:
you cannot serve two masters
- you're either the slave of God or the slave of money
you can't do both
you can't have a dollar each way!

Ashley Hale writes on money, wealth, the so-called "mammon" like this

Mammon isn't really a bad guy, but he has a bad press. The trouble is he has been publicly identified with avarice. But the plain fact is he can be either a good guy or a bad guy ... the reality is he makes a good servant but a simply awful boss. The problem arises when we look to Mammon for what only God can provide. Another way to look at this is to make sure you have it straight: whether you are using Mammon or Mammon is using you. If you put Mammon first you are courting spiritual death. That doesn't make Mammon a bad guy but it does make you a bad guy. It's like what Mark Twain said of the devil: though everybody speaks ill of him, to become spiritual leader of three quarters of the world's population shows uncommon administrative ability. When you are serving God and Mammon is serving you, things are beginning to get in the right order.

Getting things in the right order ...

- it is vital to take some time, to make the time
to have an opportunity to reflect on what our "treasure" really is
and what we are doing with it
- so this Sunday, and next Sunday we'll do just that
take some time to carefully and prayerfully consider
all that God has blessed us with, and how we are using it
- and in this we will have a special focus on "money"
specifically our individual money and what we do with it ...

Money in today's world, just like it was in the ancient world, is treasure

- and it's as important as ever to have a right relationship to it
especially in regard to faith, stewardship and giving
- each one of us is called to respond
and how we respond makes a difference

So consider, money ... yes money buys things

- it purchased the cave of Machpelah for Sarah's burial
- it bargained for the grain that saved Joseph's family from starvation
- it paid for the betrayal of Jesus
- today we accumulate gadgets and toys, stocks and investments and sear our psyches with desire

Money provides status and importance

- King Ahab gloried in his Jezebel, ivory palace and stolen vineyards only to die in his own bloody pool of insignificance
- Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, dragged God's people to Babylon dealt with Daniel's defiance, and was humbled in his madness
- the high priests zipped around in their ostentatious clothes deluded themselves that they were more important than the man they sent to be executed
- and watched with incredulity as the priceless veil of the temple split in two during his dying moment
- today money commands bodyguards and jets, Rolls Royces and red carpets adulation and publicity which eventually becomes a flat zero on the billboard of permanence

Money does give people power and control

- Solomon taxed his people to build the temple and palace to finance his harem and expand his kingdom
- Herod, partying in Roman style ordered a head on a platter for his birthday special
- money-changers, directing the traffic at the temple, victimised the impoverished lining their pockets with the sweat of the poor
- today we deplete the land, export the food set the pace for starvation

Yes, money does have value

- it feeds and clothes, shelters and educates
- it transports and entertains, provides comfort and security

Money, as the Bible records and Jesus reminds us

- can serve, but it can also master
money can contrive and devise
conceive and hatch desires that envelop the very fibre of the spirit
- money can, as many have preached down the ages
"become a deity that casts the unwary to the devil"

On the other side of the coin, Loretta Girzatis writes:

Money can buy neither peace nor joy; love nor compassion; meaning nor fulfilment. Those commodities are purchase through: poverty of spirit, meekness of heart, purity of intention, mourning empathy, merciful response, peace seeking; and the conviction that reproach and persecution are the price one pays to become salt of the earth and a light that shines before all. Let us strive to use wealth with moderation, sharing our surplus with those who have less or none, locating those who have needs so that our good measure may even out their insufficiencies. We accept the Lord's invitation to care for the poor, the ill, the unwanted.

In our Old Testament reading

- God's people are reminded of the source of all they have and enjoy:
the lord God
- all their wealth, their treasure
their cattle, sheep, silver, gold and other goodies
are not something they have earned all by themselves

The Lord God is the source of all that sustains in life

- the people of God are reminded how their God provided water in the desert
where there was none
- the people are further cautioned to remember
that is the Lord God who enables people to be rich
- in response they are to gratefully acknowledge this
especially by giving generously of their "treasure"

As I was preparing this sermon

- I came across the story of the old preacher and the two seas
this preacher contrasted the waters of the Sea of Galilee with the water of the Dead Sea

The Sea of Galilee is a natural lake that is formed by a depression of land. Water flows from the mountains into the Sea of Galilee, collects in the sea and keeps on flowing out to a larger sea. The water in the Sea of Galilee remains fresh, full of fish, life-giving. By contrast the water that flows into the Dead Sea is fresh when it arrives, but the water stays there. The Dead Sea has no outlet. The water collects there, moisture evaporates, leaving the salt, creating a sea in which there is virtually no life.

"Take this as a parable of our Christian faith," said the preacher. "The Sea of Galilee exists to give. It receives its water, and it gives it all away, and thus it remains fresh, full of life. The Dead Sea on the other hand exists to receive. It only takes and never gives. And therefore, it is dead."

(Pause)

Let us pray:

Loving God,

we hear the teachings of your son, Jesus.

We understand that we are to take care what we do with money.

We know we are called to give aid to the suffering of your world.

That is our treasure waiting for us.

We know that as we make money, you call us to use it wisely, to give generously.

*We know also that sometimes we turn away sadly, like the rich young man,
not understanding the relationship between belief and action.*

Help us to grow in faith, compassion, generosity and service.

Amen.