



feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading. (Isaiah 40:11)

June 4, 2013

Dear Church Family,

We have arrived at chapter 16 where Jesus presents some concentrated teaching on money. We have seen Jesus address issues of wealth before and I said I would take on that theme in Luke as a separate topic for a sermon. I am planning to do that next time when we have all the women, who were away at retreat, back amongst us. Not because women in particular need a teaching on money (as some of you chuckled about on Sunday), but because we need all hands on deck to deal with such a topic. Most of us are aware that we live in a culture that is highly materialistic and we are influenced by that culture. The American church is often criticized for not addressing materialism as an area of sin to the extent that it addresses other areas, (sexual ethics is most often cited). This is partly due to the difficulty in identifying materialism, but it is also that we feel vulnerable to conviction and are afraid of what conviction in this area will cost us. Nevertheless, it is an important topic in the gospel of Luke and clearly important that we allow it to shape our lives with respect to money.

Part of the context that we bring to our study of Luke is Stuart's teaching from the Psalm series. From last week's teaching on the Psalms of Ascent Stuart said that a key step in our own spiritual ascent is "a spiritual dislocation with ungodly patterns of thought and action that are impeding our ascent, our true progress." I submit that our perspective and practice with regard to money and materialism are likely candidates as ungodly patterns of thought and action, especially considering where we sojourn and dwell, our own culture of Meshech and Kedar (Psalm 120). This past Sunday we examined Jesus teachings in chapter 16 to add them to the other material in Luke.

16:1 tells us that Jesus is directly addressing his disciples, identifying money as something that competes with God for allegiance in their lives. He is providing them with perspectives that will help them handle money properly as servants of God. The first perspective is that disciples are to handle money and wealth with a firm faith orientation to the reality of a coming kingdom and seek to build wealth in that coming kingdom instead of in the present world. This is the point of the parable of the dishonest steward. This steward is commended for his shrewdness because he uses his current access to his master's wealth to prepare for a future when he will no longer have employment with his master. Jesus tells disciples to emulate this man and live in this world in light of the reality that they will be dwelling in eternity. "I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings."

How does a disciple build up wealth in eternity? In several areas of Luke, Jesus has already spoken about riches and rewards in the next life and how to build up this treasure in heaven or become rich toward God (12:21). 12:33 is one instance, Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Making friends so that you will be received in eternal dwellings involves being generous to the poor. But it is not the poor who will receive you, but rather God himself.

So a major point of Jesus teaching on money is actually an appeal to self-interest, only it is self-interest that is oriented to faith in the reality of a coming world that is different from this one. This appeal to self-interest may not sound very spiritual because it is not emphasizing a virtue, selfless generosity on behalf of others. But what is the essence of spirituality? Is it virtuous behavior or faithful behavior? Faithful behavior is an orientation of our lives toward the spiritual reality of eternity in God's kingdom. It is all about the reality of God and what He cares about.

Hebrews 11:6 “without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Another important truth Jesus teaches his disciples about handling money is that the money is not theirs but rather belongs to God. They are stewards and their handling of money can be either faithful or unrighteous. The word translated dishonest and unrighteous is the same word from 13:27 “Depart from me all you workers of evil.” Jesus sets up a strong contrast here. In handling money, one can either be a faithful servant or a worker of evil. There is no middle ground.

This strong contrast is further developed by the presentation of the handling of money as idolatry. Money is not a neutral commodity here but rather a power that is seeking allegiance that belongs to God. You cannot serve God and Money and we want to do both. We want to pursue the benefits that Money offers us in this world with all its promise of security, comfort, and pleasure. We want that to be okay and allowable as disciples of Christ, but it is not. A choice of allegiance must be made and that choice will be manifested in how we handle wealth.

The reaction of the Pharisees against Jesus’ teaching exposes their own spirituality as deeply flawed. The most disturbing aspect of this is that they are unaware of how differently God sees them than how they perceive themselves or how they are perceived in society. “What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” The story of the rich man and Lazarus drives this point home. The reversal of status between the rich man and Lazarus from this world to the next is extreme. The rich man realizes that his brothers are not living in light of what the next world will bring and wants to send back Lazarus to warn them. But they have already been warned by Moses and the prophets and are not paying attention. The sobering question is; to what extent we too might be unaware of the judgment we are under with regard to wealth in our lives?

Next time we will try to get more of a handle on how to apply this to our lives. It is fitting that we were able to celebrate communion in light of this message and topic. Ultimately, our ability to resist the idol of Money will come from a deeper love for God. It is by meditating on the depth of love and forgiveness that is ours through the cross of Christ that our hearts are captured by God for His service. As we sang in worship on Sunday, it is when we are in awe of the one who gave it all that we are truly able to surrender our souls to God and say, “All I am is yours.”

Pastorally yours,
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