

April 19, 2015

Our scripture begins this morning with Jesus walking among his disciples and saying, "Peace be with you!"

So I wondered, what brings you peace?

Is it vacation? A pet? A spouse or child? A day off?

For many Americans, peace goes hand and hand with financial security. Money, too many, brings peace.

Most people don't want to hear sermons about money because it usually means the church is asking for more of it. But this is not a stewardship sermon, although one cannot really talk about money without talking about stewardship in some form or fashion. Today I'll be talking more about perspective. How do we view money in our daily lives and what does the Bible say about it.

Did you know that 7% of the Bible talks about money? There are over 2,300 verses that tell us to be generous and good stewards of our resources. One out of every seven verses in the Gospel of Luke is about money. 11 out of the 39 parables of Jesus are about money. Jesus talks about money more than he does about heaven and hell combined. The Kingdom of God is the only thing he talks about more than money. Like I said, this is an uncomfortable topic to preach and for many of us to hear because it is something that we hold so personal and intimate. But according to the Bible, according to the life of Jesus, this is a topic we should be discussing, a topic I should be preaching on, and we should be making a priority in our lives. Money is important in life but it is not the sole reason for living.

Most Americans need a different perspective on money. When my niece was little, I was teaching her a little bit about money. I was attempting to trade 2 dimes for her quarter-which she readily accepted. When I asked her why she'd

rather have the dimes instead of the quarter she replied, “More money, more better.”

We so often want more money. More money in our bank accounts. More money in our retirement accounts. More money to save and more money to spend. But when is enough money, enough? Have you seen this commercial? (PLAY)

If we had that much money, Dave Ramsey says, “We would buy things we don’t need with money we don’t have in order to impress people we don’t even like.”

We have to continue to train our brains to get a different perspective on money.

Originally, in the Old Testament, the people of God practiced the giving of a tithe or 10% or first fruits of the best portion of their grain, cattle or lambs as a burned offering to God. In this way, people were worshiping God, recognizing that all the earth was the Lord’s, and thanking him for sharing so generously with them. Under Moses, the practice of the tithe was made a part of God’s laws for the people of God. However, under the new covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, Christians know that we are not bound by all the laws of Moses. Instead, we see the idea of a tithe to God’s work as a guideline. “What, then, does God expect of us today regarding the tithe?” God expects us to give our tithes and offerings as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and “so the church can accomplish the work of God’s kingdom through the body of Christ.” God expects the church to be “responsible for praying and discerning how God wants these resources to be used” says Adam Hamilton in his book [Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity](#).

Yet, tithing can be a challenging or scary idea for many of us, as scary as stepping off the boat to meet Jesus on stormy waters. We may fear that if we tithe there may not be enough left for us to meet our needs, wants, or wishes. Tithing can be a huge financial stretch, and some of us simply may not be able to do it.

I am not going to use this sermon to convince you to tithe. Instead, I want to use this sermon to help us to get a different perspective on money.

Now David Slagle, who's a pastor in Atlanta, had a wonderful, graphic way to illustrate how God sees this. And so I wanted to share that with you. God sees it – sort of your wealth and your income – like these ten apples that I have before me. And God says nine of these are yours to meet the vital necessities of life and to use for fun things. God understands that we need to survive and thrive in this life. We need to take care of our families. So we have need: food, clothing, shelter, outings, children, health, transportation, retirement and savings.

You've got nine of these apples. But the Lord says, "One of them is mine. And it's meant to be used, first of all, as a way for you to express your praise and your love for me – your obedience and devotion. But then I'm going to use it to accomplish my purposes in the world."

But here's what happens with many of us. Many of us find – because the society is pulling us in so many directions – that nine apples aren't enough anymore. I mean, they really aren't. How can we do all the fun stuff and the cool stuff and the stuff we need to do and pay the bills and everything on just nine apples? And so we think, "Well the Lord's not going to mind if we just take a little bit." You know, there's a trip that we've been wanting to take. And it's really important and it's a special trip. And we're just going to take just a little bit of the Lord's apple. He'll understand. So we take just a tiny bite out of the apple set aside for God. And then it's Christmastime and we didn't set anything aside for all those Christmas presents. And we need to people to know, and it's kind of giving. It's not to God, but it is to other people. It's to our children and others and so God will understand. We'll take a little more of God's apple.

Then we start thinking about retirement. It's coming up sooner than we think. And you know, I need to be setting aside more in retirement. But I can't stop spending these apples. I've got to take that from somewhere else. When an emergency doctor bill is due, we take another little bite. This is serious business

and God certainly understands. After all, we didn't set aside emergency funds in our savings account. And it's time to buy a new car. And then there's that big screen right before the Super Bowl we've been thinking about getting – and the new house. You know, our old house doesn't really satisfy us anymore and so there's that. And pretty soon there's not much left – I mean, from the Lord's apple. Wait a minute. And then we say, "Well, Lord, this is your part. I'm going to give that to you." And so God receives not our first fruits or our best gifts, but our leftovers.

This is a graphic and humorous portrayal of what we know can happen in many of our lives. The pressures and distractions begin to consume us. By the time we get around to God, there is not much left. And we many even take one last bite before we offer it to God.

We have to continue to train our brains to get a different perspective on money.

For some, tithing money may never be a possibility, but maybe we can cheerfully give a tithe of time and talents. All these are just as vital as money to the work of God. Then there are those of us who work 40+ hours a day and cannot give of our time, but can tithe from our money or wealth. I am guessing that some of you already tithe or give above and beyond. You know the blessing of the gifts given. Others of us may be working our way there.

We need to remember that we didn't make the apples. If we don't see money as a gift from God we will be spoiled and forget about the one who gave it. We will soon think that money is what gives us peace, not the Lord. God provides so much for us and we are blessed, truly blessed. It is all from God. Ideally the tenth apple is really the first apple or first fruit given to God off the top before anything else. Giving this apple to God first, before we consume the other nine apples, is a way for us to express praise, love, obedience, faithfulness, worship, and devotion to God. So maybe the best way of looking at it isn't that God wants us to give up 10% of that gift. Maybe we should thank God he lets us keep 90%. Amen.