



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

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June 25, 2013

**Dear Church Family,**

I ended the Luke series for the summer by focusing on the topic of money and wealth, which we have seen addressed in many places in the 16 chapters of Luke we have covered so far and will be addressed in several more places in the remaining 8 chapters. What do we learn from the gospel of Luke about money and particularly how a disciple of Christ is to view money and handle wealth? I think we are uncomfortable with this topic because we suspect that we are vulnerable to judgment. We might prefer to keep this area of our lives hidden (even from ourselves) so that we do not need to deal with what might be exposed. But that is not what happens when we study Scripture like the gospel of Luke. Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” We are better off when we are aware of God’s perspective on how we are handling money.

The goal is not for us to be burdened by guilt with either what we have or whenever we use money for something more than our basic needs. Nor is it for us to become more righteous so that we can feel better about ourselves. In attempting to address our own materialism, we can so easily adopt a form of legalism, setting up superficial standards of what can and cannot be owned and feeling justified when we are able to compare ourselves favorably with regard to others. The goal is that we will become better worshipers of God. Romans 12:1-2 “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” How we handle money is part of our spiritual worship. The challenge for us is how far have we become conformed to this world in this area of our lives?

We identified three truths about money presented in the gospel of Luke that our culture does not believe. If our minds are renewed around these three truths, we should have a very different perspective and practice with regard to money than the world around us.

One truth is found in Luke 16:13, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” As Richard Foster points out, “Money is not something that is morally neutral, a resource to be used in good or bad ways depending solely upon our attitude toward it. Mammon is a power that seeks to dominate us.” Having money and wealth is not evil, but it is presented as dangerous, particularly to the fruitfulness of a disciple. Jesus, in Luke 8:14 explains the third soil in the parable of the sower, “And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” This truth about money should make us cautious about spending on the cares, riches and pleasures of life. The world around us does not have this perspective and therefore does not exercise this caution.

One way that Money seeks to gain our allegiance is to present itself as able to provide for our basic needs. Jesus teaches to this in Luke 12:22-34. It is easy to see why the world is preoccupied with acquiring wealth, “For all the nations seek after these things.” We cannot really fault them for that. But you can fault a disciple because as disci-

ples we have a heavenly Father who knows that we need these things. This second truth is that we can trust in Him, “seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added to you.” That truth should mean that we are far less preoccupied with acquiring wealth for the purpose of security than people of this world.

Money also seeks to gain allegiance through the seduction of acquiring possessions that will bring us comfort and pleasure. We hear that “money cannot buy happiness”, but advertising and lifestyles of consumption testify that we do not really believe that. And believers should not take comfort in judging the excesses we might see around us. After all, when we look at our own spending, how much of it is on what gives us a more comfortable or pleasurable life? The third truth is a perspective that Jesus teaches with the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12) and the parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16). Disciples should handle wealth as if there is more than this world to consider. There is also the reality of an eternal future in the kingdom of God. It is simply wisdom for a disciple to consider how to use worldly wealth to gain treasure in heaven and not just gain treasure here in this life. And you gain treasure in heaven by helping the poor (12:33-4, 18:22). Jesus is telling disciples to apply a basic principle of economics known as opportunity cost. This is defined as “The cost of an alternative that must be forgone in order to pursue a certain action.” The alternative that should be considered is the opportunity to use money to gain treasure in heaven by spending it to help the poor rather than spending it on yourself.

With the rich fool who builds barns and the rich man who does nothing to help Lazarus, we are given two men who use their wealth entirely for themselves in this life; the first in order to secure his future provision and the second in a lavish lifestyle of pleasure. They are extreme examples of those who do not prepare for their future in eternity because they do not use any of their wealth to help the poor.

It is not wrong to spend money on possessions that bring pleasure and comfort, but this spending should be balanced with an intentional investment in the future by taking very seriously the call to help the poor. This is the third area where our perspective on money should be distinctive from the world because the world does not believe in treasure in heaven.

In light of these three distinctive truths, if we find that our handling of wealth is pretty similar to those who are not disciples of Christ, we need to confess that we have conformed to this world and ask God to help us repent and begin to handle our wealth differently. We have work to do, but do not make the mistake of trying to clean yourself up to make yourself more acceptable to God. Remember the gospel, the good news that Christ is the source of our acceptance and he provides the help we need to become better disciples. Hebrews 4 talks of the sharp sword of scripture and being “naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Remember that God has always seen us as we are and loved us anyway. And see what Hebrews 4 says next, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

In Him,  
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