

A Christian Attitude to Money

Readings: 1 Timothy 6: 6-11

Matthew 6: 19-34

Jesus talks a lot about money and he tells lots of stories involving money. Also, if you look through Luke, Chapters 18-22 there is a tremendous amount about money - and this at a critical time in Jesus' life.

If you go out from home, what do you take with you? Your keys, your money and; perhaps, a mobile phone. It's the same if you go on holiday: you take your passport, tickets and money. We arrived in Rio once and couldn't find anywhere that would accept our cards or travellers' cheques; it gave me a real sense of panic and powerlessness. If you are on holiday, you feel on edge, don't you, until you've changed your first lot of money.

Money says a lot about us. How much we have perhaps says how clever we are, what our background is, and how important we are. It's power too, as you realise if you are on holiday in the Third World. And it gives freedom.

But what is a Christian attitude to money? The Bible doesn't say, "Keep away from money; it's bad." And the fact that Jesus says so much about it shows he realises we're immersed in a world where money is vital. But the Bible does say:

"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"

1 Timothy 6:10

"Keep your life free from the love of money"

Hebrews 13:5

Why? I think because:

- 1) Money can become our security (as in the parable of the complacent man who builds his barns and sits back, or in the story of the rich young man meeting Jesus, and he can't let go of his wealth).
- 2) It becomes our measure of our status. Our status as Christians should surely come from knowing ourselves loved, forgiven and guided by God, nothing to do with money.
- 3) It can become the focus of our energy. Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). It's not wrong to have money; it's our attitude to it that's important; and the Bible suggests that the more we have, the more likely it is to take over our lives. That's why Jesus says; "*It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle*" (Matthew 19:24). He's very blunt, isn't he! And another comment of Jesus': "*You cannot serve God and money*" (Luke 16:13).

The reason a Christian can and should avoid getting caught up in the money ratrace is that the Bible says God will give us what we need if we trust him. Do we trust him to do that? Have we seen God doing that for us? Do we really believe God knows and cares about you and your boiler breaking down, and your car needing a new tyre, and your worry that you won't have enough saved when an unexpected bill comes in? It's only years of trying it out and finding it to be true that can convince us he does give us what we need and that he cares. But it's so exciting when we see it happening! Jesus says, "*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*" (Matthew 6:33).

And if God gives us what we need, then we can afford to be generous. In fact, we can probably increase in our

generosity year by year if we are experiencing him meeting our needs. Yes, generous with our time, generous with caring, generous with our attention to others, but also generous with our money. And we can't say, "That's for people who have lots of spare cash." Jesus teaches very plainly that we are to be generous with the little we have. Most Sundays we say in the service, "All things come from you, and of your own do we give to you." In other words, he gives us everything we have, so we can afford to give some to others. The more we hang on to it, the more God will challenge us to let go. And a guide in the Old Testament of how much to give away was 1/10 of our income. That's a guide, not a rule; God doesn't want us getting legalistic about "1/10 to him, 9/10 to me." And putting a figure on it could destroy the spirit of it, which is to echo God's generosity to us. But, still, it's a guide.

So, what is a Christian attitude to money? It's very simple: trust God to give you what you need, and be generous with your money.

Chris van Straaten