

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

What Else Does The Bible Say About Money?

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Matthew 6:24 and other

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 6:24. For several weeks now we have been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount. Last week we heard Jesus commending to his disciples a SINGULAR ALLEGIANCE with respect to their values and ambitions. He said:

“No one 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.” (Matthew 6:24 ESV)

So in that passage Jesus identified MONEY as a potential rival to God in terms of the AMBITIONS and ALLEGIANCE of the human heart. But of course it isn't the only potential rival that we must be aware of - Jesus said essentially the same thing about FAMILY in Luke 14, he said:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26 ESV)

HATE is often used in semitic discourse to highlight an emphatic choice. NOT THIS BUT THAT. It is a way of underscoring the fact that some choices in this life are BINARY. You can only have ONE BEST FRIEND, you can only have ONE TOP PRIORITY and you can only have ONE SUPREME LOYALTY. If you try to live a life with divided loyalties, eventually you will have to LOVE one and HATE the other. That's just how life works, Jesus says:

You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24 ESV)

Just like you cannot serve God and wife.

Just like you cannot serve God and children.

Only one thing can be at the centre of your solar system – that's how PHYSICS works! The thing with the most gravity will claim the centre and everything else will gather and arrange itself around that.

So be careful what you put in the centre.

That's what we were talking about last week. MONEY MUST BE REJECTED as a potential rival to God.

But that leaves an awful lot UNSAID when it comes to the subject of money doesn't it? So this week, I thought we would do a sort of “Excursus” sermon so that could drill down a little deeper on this issue. So we're going to play sword drill today – we're going to jump all over the Bible in order to answer the question:

What Else Does The Bible Say About Money?

We'll put our first one in from last week. The Bible says very clearly that MONEY must be rejected as a potential rival to God.

1. It must be rejected as a potential rival to God

So write that down. Highlight Matthew 6:24 and then leave a marker there as we prepare to check in with some other passages this morning. Turn over now to 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

2. It isn't evil in and of itself

We sometimes think that the Bible says that MONEY is the root of all EVIL, but that isn't actually what the Scriptures say. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 reads as follows. It says:

“But those who **desire to be rich** fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Timothy 6:9–10 ESV)

So that's really just saying what Jesus said in Matthew 6. Money can't be your LOVE, it can't be your DESIRE, it can't be your life AMBITION and GOAL, because if it is, your life will be filled with darkness and shadow.

I was at my daughter's High School graduation a couple of weeks ago and it was surprising to me how many of the graduates listed “making lots of money” as their life goal. You used to hear that once or twice as the list of graduates was read off, and you would smile at the awkward teenage attempt at humour, but this was graduate after graduate after graduate. The MC even remarked upon it. Heaven help us if we have a generation of young people whose driving ambition in life is to make a lot of money – because it is awful hard to make a lot of money without crushing a lot of people underneath your feet on the way up the mountain.

That's what the Apostle Paul is saying here. It is the LOVE OF MONEY – the CRAVING FOR RICHES – that plunges people into ruin and destruction. That's what we have to watch out for. Money is a cruel MASTER – but it can be a good and useful FRIEND and it is treated in the Bible as a BLESSING, not a curse. At the end of the Job narrative – which is held out in the

Bible as both TRUE in the sense that it happened but also TRUE in the sense that it serves as a parable for human life, after suffering a series of tragedies that sorely tested his faith, in the end, Job has his fortune RESTORED by the blessing of God. Job 42:10 says:

“And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job 42:10 ESV)

Interestingly, some modern Bible scholars don't like that ending. They want the ending to be: “Job died a poor and sick man, but he learned to be content with God alone.” But that isn't how the Holy Spirit wrote the story. He said:

“the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job 42:10 ESV)

Why?

Because money isn't a CURSE, it is a blessing!

That's really what the Bible says about money. The Bible is NOT anti-material – for crying out loud, the Bible begins with the words:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

So God is not ANTI-MATERIAL – God is the source and Creator of all material!! The problem with money, in the Bible, is actually US. We are inclined to worship the creation instead of the Creator. That's the issue. We worship the GIFTS instead of the GIVER. We're stupid like that! That is the literal definition of idolatry. Idolatry is when we treat a GOOD thing as if it were a GOD thing. But that doesn't make the GOOD things BAD. Money isn't EVIL anymore than FAMILY is evil. The problem isn't having money – just like the problem isn't having a wife or a husband or a child – the problem is when we WORSHIP THOSE GOOD THINGS as if they were GOD THINGS.

That's the problem.

So MONEY in the bible is treated as a GOOD THING that SINFUL PEOPLE tend to value incorrectly and pursue indiscriminately. That's the issue.

But money itself is good – God created it and people will still HAVE it even in eternity – did you know that? In Revelation 21:24 when the Bible is describing the NEW HEAVENS and the NEW EARTH it talks about the NEW JERUSALEM which will be the capital city of the restored universe and the Bible says:

“the kings of the earth will bring their **glory** into it” (Revelation 21:24 ESV)

That's a direct allusion to Isaiah 60 where it talks about the kings of the nations bringing their WEALTH as an offering to God in Jerusalem at some point in the future, leading Bible scholars like G.K. Beale to declare in his commentary on Revelation 21:24:

“This apparently is intended to be understood as literal wealth coming from the nations.”¹

So there is going to be MONEY and WEALTH in eternity! We're going to dig stuff up out of the earth and make things and accumulate things – but the good news is, we aren't going to worship those things, like sinners do now, rather, we are going to WORSHIP WITH THOSE THINGS just as we were created and intended to do in the beginning. Thanks be to God!

Alright, the third thing the Bible says about money is that:

3. It is good to have a little, and dangerous to have a lot

There is a great prayer in Proverbs chapter 30 that goes like this:

¹ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* in The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 1095.

“give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” (Proverbs 30:8–9 ESV)

That’s a fantastic prayer and it’s kind of similar to the 4th petition in the Lord’s Prayer:

“Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11 ESV)

So, according to the Bible, it is good to pray for ENOUGH. We should pray that because it is a good thing to have enough money to pay your bills, buy your groceries and to fill up your car with gas. If you can do all of that and still have a FEW DOLLARS in your pocket before the next paycheque comes, according to the Bible, that’s a GOOD THING. There is nothing wrong with having enough money to meet your daily needs – you should be praying for that and you should be WORKING for that. The Bible says that God GIVES US MONEY by giving us the ability to make money:

“You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18 ESV)

I love how that is worded by the way. Right alongside the reminder that God gives us the power to get wealth is the reminder that we must worship God and not the wealth we have the power to accumulate. The bible is SO MINDFUL of our tendency to worship the gifts instead of the Giver. But, here the simple point is that God doesn’t just give us WEALTH – he gives us the POWER to get wealth. Remember, we were created to cultivate! We were created by God and given a great world – so we have the capacity and we have the resources – and then God said: “Go! Till the ground! Work the raw materials! Use your intelligence and ability and make wealth!”

That same basic approach can be seen in the New Testament. Paul says:

“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10 ESV)

Now, the key word there obviously is WILLING. A person who is disabled obviously can't work – they may be willing to work but they can't – Paul isn't talking about that person, he is just saying, in line with Deuteronomy 8 that God isn't the handout department, he is the RESOURCE and TRAINING department. He wants YOU to make wealth with the gifts and opportunities he supplies. And then he wants you to use that wealth to take care of yourself and to take care of your family. The Bible says:

“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8 ESV)

So the faith of the Bible assumes that you are going to work, it assumes that you are going to accumulate some wealth and it assumes that you are going to use that wealth to look after yourself and your family. None of that is BAD – all of that is GOOD – and all of that comes from the Lord, thanks be to God!

So it's GOOD to have a little bit of money – but it is dangerous to have more than you need. We saw that in the prayer in Proverbs 30. He asked for ENOUGH MONEY but not too much:

lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” (Proverbs 30:9 ESV)

Being rich is dangerous because rich people are tempted to think that they don't need God. Rich people are tempted to think that they are better than other people. Rich people are tempted to trust in themselves rather than in the grace and mercy of God. That's why Jesus said:

“Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:23–24 ESV)

You know, I said last week that it is a funny thing that most of us DREAM of being able to give our children and grandchildren all the things we didn't have as children. We want them to have the beautiful lakefront cottage, the Muskoka boat, the jet ski and the new car at 16 and the trips to

Europe and the McMansion down in Forest Hill – we want to GIVE THEM THAT – and there is something GOOD in that, we are supposed to care for our families – but we never seem to factor in Matthew 19:23-24, because according to Jesus, making your kids RICH – providing them with a WEALTHY lifestyle, might actually be the greatest unkindness you could ever do to them. It may make them happier for the next 20,30 or 40 years but it may also cause them to be miserable and in agony, in the dark, away from God for all eternity – so why in the world would we want to do that?

Instead, we should be praying the prayer of Proverbs 30 over our kids and grandkids: “God give my loved ones neither poverty nor riches. Give them that which is needful. May they always have enough but do not give them so much that they forget you, nor so little that they be tempted to steal and defraud and so dishonour you and bring shame upon themselves, I ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.”

Amen – that’s a good prayer because according to the Bible it is good to have a little money, but dangerous to have a lot.

The fourth thing the Bible says about money is that:

4. It can be used to open doors in eternity

I mentioned last week that Jesus gave the same teaching we were looking at in Matthew 6 in Luke’s Gospel in chapter 16. He was making the same point but in a different context and with some different illustrations. So in Luke 16:13 he said:

“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.” (Luke 16:13 ESV)

Ok, we’ve seen that before, but like I said, this time, he used a different illustration. He told the story of the Dishonest or Incompetent Manager. He talks about a guy who squandered his

master's wealth through poor management and was about to be fired, so he uses his Master's resources to curry favour with some of his wealthy clients, figuring that they would look after him when he was unemployed – and Jesus COMMENDS HIM as an example to be followed! Listen to the application Jesus makes, he says:

For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, **use worldly wealth** to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, **you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings**. (Luke 16:8–9 NIV11)

That's arguably the most incredible thing that Jesus ever said – it is absolutely paradigm busting! Jesus doesn't say it is wrong to have wealth – the point of the parable is not that it was GOOD for the manager to swindle his billionaire Master because who in the world should have that kind of money anyway? He could have said that but he didn't. Instead he makes one simple – and astonishing point. He says: “Use whatever money you have at your disposal to open doors for yourself in the eternal kingdom.”

Are you hearing that? USE MONEY NOW to open doors for yourselves in eternity!

Remember, Jesus said all the time that:

“many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Matthew 19:30 ESV)

The Final Judgment is going to be completely UPEND human life and society! There are going to be a lot of people who are poor now living the Vida Loca in the eternal kingdom so you want to be friends with those people! They are going to be managing 5 cities and overseeing thousands of properties and mansions in heaven – and you may need a job! That's literally the punchline of this parable! The poor old lady living on the garbage dump outside of Cairo who loves Jesus and collects plastic bottles to sell so she can help support the single mom in the tent next door is going to be ABSOLUTELY LOADED in the eternal kingdom – so it would be wise to do something nice for her. That will improve your own experience in eternity – that's what Jesus is

saying. Money given to the Lord's Little Ones NOW will result in blessing and increase for you LATER.

Now you say, "Pastor, I'm not sure I like that. You sound a little crass right now. I'm not sure the Kingdom works like that. That seems a little tit for tat."

Well, again, you are welcome to think that, but as for me, I'm sticking with what the Bible says. Old Testament and New, this principle is clearly taught. Proverbs 19:17 says:

"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed." (Proverbs 19:17 ESV)

That sounds pretty straight forward to me. Give to the poor now, receive back from the Lord with interest in eternity. Done.

Jesus said the same thing in the New Testament; he said:

"whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42 ESV)

Old Testament and New, anything given to the Lord's Little Ones NOW will result in blessing and increase in eternity. I didn't write the Bible, but I can read the Bible and that is precisely what the Bible says. You can use worldly wealth to open up doors in eternity.

And then the last thing we should probably say is that money can also be used to do good things in the here and now.

5. It can be used to do good in the here and now

Flip over in your Bible to Acts 4:34-35. There is a little snapshot there of the church in its early and ideal state. The text says:

“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” (Acts 4:34–35 ESV)

That’s awesome – and it is incredible because as we learn in Acts 5 there was a huge influx of people – many of them poor widows – coming into the church in Jerusalem. That’s what led people to sell their property to make these donations in the first place. What was happening was that many of the people who had come to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost and who were subsequently converted by the preaching of Peter – remember 3000 people were baptized on that day – many of those people were staying. After all, there was no Christian church to attend back in Rome or in Corinth or in Athens – so they relocated to Jerusalem. They didn’t have jobs yet, some of them didn’t even speak the local language so they were completely dependent on the church, at least in the short term. And so people stepped up. They sold properties. At the end of Acts 4 it gives an example of that, it says:

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. (Acts 4:36–37 ESV)

So that would be like if revival broke out here in Orillia and a THOUSAND people got saved in a weekend and so all the sudden we need like 5 staff deacons to care for those people and at least two more pastors and we need to run the kitchen now 7 days a week – and we need to do all of that IMMEDIATELY! We don’t have time for a fund raiser – we can’t wait for the Christmas offering – so someone here makes the decision to sell their cottage up in Muskoka and to lay the proceeds at the feet of the Elected Elders. “Here’s 2 million dollars brothers. Use it to care for these dear folks.”

Wow!

No wonder they gave Barnabas the nickname “Son of Encouragement”. No kidding!

That's the sort of thing that was happening in the early church!

Now, that doesn't mean that ALL the early Christians sold their properties. Christians weren't communists. We know that because in the first couple of centuries almost ALL the churches were meeting in people's HOUSES. At the end of Paul's letters, for example, he is often found giving greetings to the person who hosted the church gathering. So Colossians 4:15 says:

“Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” (Colossians 4:15 ESV)

He doesn't say: “Rebuke Nympha for owning a house” he says GREET HER, show honour to her for making her home available to the people of God.

We see that again and again and again in the New Testament and we see it also in archaeology – most of the churches we know of in the first several generations met in larger houses.

So to state the obvious – owning a large house is not a sin. In fact, it can be very helpful. Have you got a large house? Hold on to that because we might need it in the not too distant future. It is not at all inconceivable to me that at some point in the future our government might declare Sunday a CARBON ZERO day – no driving for any purpose whatsoever. Well, that would be a problem for us. Quick show of hands – how many of you drove more than 3 km to get to church today? About 80%. So if something like that were to happen we wouldn't be able to meet as 450 people under one roof, we would need to transition to being 10 churches of 45 or 20 churches of 20-25 people each – so that's a lot of big houses. So again, if you have one, please register that with the main office because just like the little donkey in the Palm Sunday story a disciple may show up at your house one day very soon saying “the Lord has need of it” – so, just saying, be prepared for that.

Money can be used to advance the Lord's work and can be used to bless the Lord's people in the here and now.

The bottom line, my friends, is this: money is a good tool and a bad god; but do you know who is a good God? God. So worship him. Come into a right relationship with him through the person and work of Jesus Christ – and organize everything else in your life around that. Put MONEY in its proper place. Use it to take care of your family. Use it to open up doors for yourself in eternity and use it to do good to everyone and especially to the household of faith - thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.