



You're on your Honour

Malachi 3:6-12; 2 Cor 9:6-15

Cash, brass, ackers, bread, gelt, l'argent, dosh, dough, greens, lolly, moola, readies, smackeroos, spondoolies, wonga. Loads money!

Yes, you guessed it. Today I'm going to talk about money! Money? Money's one of those sort of subjects that has an unwritten taboo in church. We hear a sermon on the subject about once every year or two. Pastors don't like to preach on it and people often don't like to hear. Why? Because talking about money in a money-driven society like ours is cutting too close to the personal bone. It's rather like talking about politics or sex. It's a deeply personal thing. After all, we're not Arthur Daley are we? And we don't like personal things – but nothing should be beyond the authority of God in your life if you're a Christian and that includes your wallet!

And God knows that. He understands that. It's no surprise therefore that the Bible actually has much on the subject. John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California, said that *"sixteen out of thirty-eight of Christ's parables deal with money; more is said in the New Testament about money than Heaven and hell combined; five times more is said about money than prayer; and where there are five hundred-plus verses on both prayer and faith, there are over two thousand verses dealing with money and possessions."*

Why? Because of this. *1 Timothy 6:10: For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, in their eagerness to get rich, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with much pain. (ESV)*

The love of money. It isn't money that is a root of all kinds of evil. It's the love of it. Money is useful and an important part of modern society, but it becomes a root of all kinds of evil when people love it. . What does love of money mean? It means we've made money a priority in our life when the love of God should be. people fight over it, they steal it, they cheat with it, they get greedy, they make it the most important priority. "Money makes the world go round". In other words, the love of money is a kind of idolatry. Therefore there is much in scripture about the use and misuse of money and possessions because God does not tolerate idolatry.

If you think that doesn't apply to you because you're a Christian, then consider this. The most common form of idolatry in the OT was where the people of Israel worshiped God but also had other gods in their life as well. The worshiped God and Baal – not on. God severely punished them. He does not share His affection with lumps of wood or for that matter wads of notes or nice possessions. And we live in a generation that is strongly possessions driven and self gratifying and Christians are just as prone to it as anyone else.

I would like to explore this subject in rather the same way as I explored the basic issues of faith when I first came. It would be easy to be legalistic about giving. Many Christians are. There were clear laws in

the Old Testament about what should be given and then. But as believers, we are objects of grace, not of Old Testament law. But grace is not about kopping out of living a righteous life before God but looking at how we should live according to what God has done for us in Christ. So what I have to say this morning is giving us a grace-centred perspective, not law centred and hopefully we'll see the difference. So what can we say about money and giving: four things.

◆ All we have comes from God

Either directly or ultimately, all life on earth, all human existence and the whole basis of society finds its roots in a Creator. In the 1970s I was fascinated by a science history series by James Burke called Connections. What he did was to show that things we take for granted have come about by all sorts of strange routes. The same is true of modern society. People today are interested in the environment. But who made the environment – the sun, soil, weather, plants, animals - God. We fear in these days that the activities of people are destroying the environment. God made it: we are trashing it. Without what God has given; we're dead. In the OT they appreciated that, as most grew their own food but we are not as connected as in the OT because we have money which WE have earned. But if it were not for the environment God created, there would be no air, no life, no people, no coal, no oil, no soil – all the things which create wealth and eventually leads to the money that we earn isn't ultimately ours, but His.

But for Christians, there's something even more significant. we've just recognised it in Easter. In order to redeem us, God paid a price. The price was the blood of His own Son whom He gave up for us.. And His Son Jesus, willingly gave His life for us. That's how much we were worth to Him. He paid the ultimate price. Notice that word gave. He gave. For God so love the world that He gave His only Son. Right from the start of my ministry here, I've emphasised that we have a gracious God. He is prepared to give, give, give, give to us without merit. We give because God first gave for us. Just as we love because He first lived us. If you love, you give. *15 Let us thank God for his priceless gift!*

◆ We worship God in giving.

If God is the source of all life and wealth and as a result, God expects – commands – us to recognise His grace towards us in giving. We read this: 7 You should each give, then, as you have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly. God loves a cheerful giver. A better translation of cheerful is hilarious. God loves a hilarious giver.

Now there is hilarious and hilarious. You know, there are ways people try to make giving fun – children in Need, Comic Relief, Sport Relief. They tried to convince us that the National Lottery is fun. Have fun – play the national lottery! Hey, have fun – burn your money!!

God wants us to understand that giving is a pleasure. It's a pleasure to Him and it should be a pleasure to us because in giving to Him, we see His kingdom extended in people's lives. But for God, giving was a sacrificial thing - literally – to give His Son. It wasn't necessarily pleasant at the time – but now it gives Him pleasure each time someone comes to Christ. Jesus said that there is more joy in heaven over one person who repents than the ninety nine who who don't need to.

As we worship God in giving, God gives us the pleasure of seeing Him at work. We find it easy to give God cheap worship. Coming on a Sunday to worship using words and music is cheap because words are cheap. Real worship that honours God is when it's sacrificial – even when it hurts. When we are prepared to give up our money, our time, or possessions, ourselves – that's when giving is worship because that honours the One who gave His all for our salvation. Paul says in *Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. (NIV)* We love because God first loved us could easily be applied as: *We give because God first gave to us.* Too often we try to offer God our bling in worship when He deserves from us what is most precious – and that isn't just the wads of cash in our wallets but our time, our possessions, our relationship and ourselves!

◆ God blesses out of proportion to our generosity

Now this is what I find amazing as we look at both of these passages we had read this morning. The

governing NT verse is 2 Cor 9:6 *Remember that the person who plants few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop.* Imagine that God is the owner of a large bank – in one sense He is, it's called all of creation. We know we have a God who is generous. God's Bank doesn't lend. God is gracious – He just pays out. Perhaps this illustration helps:

A hiker was thirsty for a drink, but could not find water, until he came to an abandoned house. There he found a pump, and proceeded to pump with all the strength he had remaining. No water came forth. Then he saw a small jug with a cork at the top and a penciled note, directing that the water in the jug be poured into the pump to prime it. At first the thirsty man questioned this, but when he followed directions he obtained satisfying water. Before going his way, he filled the jug with water so the next thirsty person could secure water. He added to the note, "Believe me, it really works. You have to give it all away before you can get anything back." This story reminds us of the principle stated by the Apostle Paul, "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6).

I often encourage people to rely on the promises of God. In both Malachi 3 and 2 Corinthians 9 I believe we have one of the cast iron promises that works for everyone who tries it. In Malachi 3, the people were not honouring God in the payment of tithe money to upkeep the Temple and everything that went with it. The Law stipulated a tenth but by the time of Malachi they were rationalising it to a lot less and there was insufficient food in the stores to feed those who ministered there and the poor they helped. And we see God saying to them "You're robbing me!" Why? As a nation, this was a time when Judah was returning to God and saying Yes, we will honour You. We will obey Your law? But like Arthur Daley they were bending it to suit their wallets. And God said "You're robbing me!"

But these harsh words come with a promise. *Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple, so that there will be plenty of food there. Put me to the test and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things. 11 I will not let insects destroy your crops, and your grapevines will be loaded with grapes. 12 Then the people of all nations will call you happy, because your land will be a good place to live. "Put me to the test" Try me out, give me a whirl. Give what honours me and I'll open the floodgates of heaven.*

It's the same in 2 Corinthians: *8 And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause. 9 As the scripture says, "He gives generously to the needy; his kindness lasts forever." 10 And God, who supplies seed for the sower and bread to eat, will also supply you with all the seed you need and will make it grow and produce a rich harvest from your generosity. 11 He will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times, so that many will thank God for your gifts which they receive from us.*

Pay into God's bank and He pays out in abundance. Honour Him in your generosity and He will bless and honour you. In both cases, God never promised He will make you rich financially, but you'll have enough and be rich spiritually. Auntie Gwen's testimony. And mine.

That's true I believe as a church too. If we honour God in our financial obligations as a church, God will honour us and the witness of this fellowship. It's something we need to examine ourselves carefully about. The bottom line is that if we honour God with our generosity, He honours His people richly because He's gracious, but if we are tight-fisted, don't expect to see blessings.

It's a strange irony that Christians think nothing of paying to use a fitness club, or a golf club, or going to use the swimming pool, or going out for a meal. But when it comes to a freewill offering in church – how much grace do we show? *One day a twenty pound note and a pound coin were talking whilst lying in a wallet. The twenty was talking about all the interesting places it had been – to a posh restaurant, a stylish boutique, a department store, a nice hotel. It had really gone to some interesting places. Huh said the pound "All I ever do is go to church!"* To run a church of this size costs around £1000 a week. And in Baptist churches we receive no finding from outside – either from the Denomination or outside people or bodies. If you are a visitor this morning, we're not after your cash – running this place is the responsibility of the Church. We just want to share Jesus with you.

So when it comes to giving, the question may be asked "How much?" "A tenth?" "A tenth of gross or

net income?” Let me answer it like this. A man once walked into a Rolls Royce showroom. He was shown the latest Phantom limousine – you know, like Alan Sugar has. In the course of examining it, the man asked the salesman how much the Roller did to the gallon. The reply was “if you have to ask that question, you can’t afford the car!”

If we have to even ask the question “How much” then perhaps we’ve missed how much God values us – we were worth everything. It’s between me and God and you and God according to our own conscience. I’ll explore this a little more this evening. You are on your honour. You have the challenge of worship, you have the challenge of God’s promise. Do we want God’s blessings in our lives, in our church? The we are answerable, not to me, or not to the leaders – but to God. What is our reply to the God who says “Test me and see”? You’ve seen God’s grace in action in your life as you came to Christ. You know the promise that God will pour out His grace if you are prepared to be a generous giver. So how much grace are you going to show in giving of the wealth that God has given to you?

Many Christians talk about the tithe. Should we do that? I would say that if every believer in a church of our size gave according to a strict 10%, then the church would have no financial difficulty this year or any year. It’s as simple as that. So it’s a handy measure and it has a scriptural basis.

But before you think that a tithe is a good idea remember this – 10% is what agents take for actors and celebrities they represent. Or it’s the size of tip you give a waiter or a hairdresser. Now if we are happy to pay a waiter a 10% tip, why are we so reluctant to give the same to God? In fact it’s a downright insult to compare God to a waiter! That’s why the word tithe is never connected to Christian giving in the NT because if it were then we would devalue a God who gave His most precious thing for us. Instead, it gives us the freedom to offer God 20%, 30%, %50%, 100%! For Jews who were under law, they would give 10% and not one penny more. They looked for get-out clauses. With grace there is no get-out clause. Christians are cheerful givers so our thinking should be – how much MORE can I give so that I can have pleasure in seeing the kingdom of God extended?

Law can guilt-ride people into giving. It can generate fear in people to make them give. Grace just says, look at the giving God, look at His promises and then joyfully give and give more because He wants to bless us so much through it.

◆ Giving is a witness

10 And God, who supplies seed for the sower and bread to eat, will also supply you with all the seed you need and will make it grow and produce a rich harvest from your generosity. 11 He will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times, so that many will thank God for your gifts which they receive from us. 12 For this service you perform not only meets the needs of God's people, but also produces an outpouring of gratitude to God. 13 And because of the proof which this service of yours brings, many will give glory to God for your loyalty to the gospel of Christ, which you profess, and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else. 14 And so with deep affection they will pray for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown you.

It isn’t just god who remembers the generous – so do other people. As we give, people who we help, whether Christians or the wider community, see our generosity and praise God. We often don’t even see this one coming. Yet it was God’s priceless gift purchased on Calvary that has attracted us and we are called to be like Him. God has shown us extraordinary grace, amazing grace, outrageous grace. look at 11 *He will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times, so that many will thank God for your gifts which they receive from us.* If we are people who take pleasure in giving, He gives us the where with all to give to others. I know of many people who are sacrificial givers even though they are like the widow who only had a small coin to put in the treasury – but it’s strange because they always do not seem to lack in having something to bless others with! Let’s show outrageous grace in our giving and I believe we’ll see even more of God’s outrageous grace in all aspects of our church life. It’s a promise of God after all. And people see it and recognise God in it.

You are on your honour. How are we to honour God who paid so high a price on our behalf? God loves a hilarious giver! Someone who gets pleasure out of doing what God does - give. What is He calling us to give of the wealth He has graciously already given to us? What on a regular basis for the upkeep of His work here? What about offerings to other causes? One off things ;like the Bicentenary? It’s

between us and Him – but it comes with a promise: Remember that the person who plants few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop.

Prayer

Preached by Mark Reid

MRBC Felixstowe

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Scripture quotes TEV unless otherwise stated.