

What Does Christ Teach?

The Christian and Money

Mark 10:17-31

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Bethany Church

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Stumpy Grinder and his wife Martha were from Portland, Maine. Every year they went to the Portland Fair and every year Stumpy said, *“Ya know, Mahtha, I’d like ta get a ride in that theah aihplane.”* And every year, Martha would say *“I know, Stumpy, but that aihplane ride costs ten dollahs... and ten dollahs is ten dollahs.”* Finally, one year Stumpy said, *“By Jeebers, Mahtha, I’m 71 yeahs old, and if I don’t go this time I may nevah go.”* Martha replied, *“Stumpy, that there aihplane ride is ten dollahs... and ten dollahs is ten dollahs.”* Overhearing them, the pilot said, *“Folks, I’ll make you a deal. I’ll take you both up for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say ONE WORD, then I won’t charge you. But just ONE WORD and it’s ten dollars.”* They agreed and up they went... the pilot did all kinds of twists and turns, rolls and dives, but not a word was heard. He did it one more time, and there was still no word... so he landed. He turned to Stumpy as they came to a stop and said, *“By golly, I did everything I could think of to get you to holler out, but you didn’t.”* Stumpy replied, *“Well, I was gonna say something when Mahtha fell out... but like she said, ‘Ten dollahs is ten dollahs!’”*

You may have heard that story before. It is silly. Most of us won’t value \$10 over another person; however, that doesn’t mean we correctly value money or the things it buys. In truth most people struggle with money and its value. It is hard to know what its proper value is. Many people spend nights worrying about their investments, their debt and impending bills. They pay outrageous interest rates and finance charges for things they really can’t afford.

Financial problems not only rob them of peace, but they rob their children as well. Oh, their children may be well clothed and fed, but their children don't have parents that are present, energetic or joyful. Instead, the parents are over-committed, over-spent and preoccupied. If those words describe you, you're not a bad person; but can you say that is God's will for you? People in this situation feel guilty, and usually they cope with guilt by using even more money. They try to appease their children by buying them things. They supply them, for example, with over-priced, name-brand clothes, shoes and expensive toys; and they console themselves by spending money on hobbies, clothing, furnishings, gadgets and entertainment. All of that makes them even more focused on money. Although they may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the savior of the world, although they may take some time to worship and put money in an offering plate, they find themselves enslaved financially, caught in a trap. Can you relate? Do you find yourself worried about money? Are you working primarily to pay bills? Do you resent the church's requests for money? Jesus observed this kind of slavery. He said:

No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money. (Matthew 6:24)

Christ knew that money posed a great problem for people. Two thirds of his parables touched on the subject. In summarizing Christ's teaching, I chose a gospel text where money prevented a religious man from inheriting eternal life. Did you hear that? A respected and religious man's attitude toward money prevented him from inheriting eternal life.

In Mark, chapter 10, a young and wealthy man sought Jesus out. Not a bad thing to do. He asked him, "***Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?***" This was not a philosophical question. This man suffered fear. George Gallup discovered that the majority of Americans fear that God won't love them when they die. Did you know that percentage-wise

young adults, ages 18 to 24, worry twice as much about death as people do who are older than 65? What happens when you die? Will God accept you? How can you be sure?

Jesus put him off a second. He answered, “***Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.***” Why did Jesus say that? The text suggests it was a zinger. A zinger is something you say to people to provoke them to think, but you don’t intend to discuss it. It often, however, sets up what you are going to say next, and it did that for Jesus. Do you know what Jesus said next? He didn’t say what we would expect. He didn’t say, “Believe in me and you will inherit eternal life.” He says that elsewhere, but he didn’t say it here. Instead, he said to the young man, “***You know the commandments,***” and he began listing them. Why did Jesus do that? Look at wealthy young man’s response. He said that he kept them all since he was a boy. This man was righteous in his own eyes. He met his own standard of righteousness. Don’t most of us? Most of us don’t think we are that bad? We are pretty good in our own eyes. This man was good in his own eyes; and with his zinger, Jesus was saying, “You may be good in your own eyes, but that doesn’t mean a thing. That carries no weight.” You don’t fully see the consequences of your attitudes and actions. Besides, who is going to judge you when you die? Are you going to judge yourself? Are *your* values going to control *your* judgment? Isn’t it the judge’s values that matter? Are you your creator? At the end are you the judge? This rich man was righteous in his eyes but miserable. Jesus looked at that young man and loved him. Therefore, his answer wasn’t to push him off. With compassion, Christ said:

One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. (Mark 10:21)

This respected man could not do it. Something else had his heart and his faith. You see faith is dependence. Faith in God is dependence upon God. The disciples had given up everything, but this man couldn’t. He had compartmentalized his life. He did religious things to

please God, but that wasn't faith. In the end, he had faith in money not God. Money or the things it provided was his hope, his help, his confidence, his dream and joy. Jesus was disappointed and remarked twice about how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

I use to thank my lucky stars I wasn't that rich man, but then realized that I had to make the same choice. Would Christ be just a compartment in my life? Would Christ be someone I admired and tried to please, while I pursued other things? Or would I actually depend on him? What is my trust, my hope, and my financial security? Would the primary goal of my life be to invest my time and money in his work? *Would my life focus on his kingdom, or would it focus on his help to build my kingdom?* We all face that choice.

Some pastors have asked me why I focus on tithing when Jesus didn't talk about it much. Only one time in all his recorded speech does Jesus mention tithing. That one time, he affirms its appropriateness, but that's it. Jesus never excused anyone from tithing, and he never would. He said that anyone who counsels another to break a sliver of the law will be exposed as the least in the kingdom. I teach tithing as a beginner's step and discipline for one who wants to partner with God and follow Christ. It's very appropriate for people to tithe, who want to develop a Christ-like faith. In this way they can see whether God will bless. For many of us, when we begin to return a tenth of our income, we can't compartmentalize our lives because in tithing we end up having to depend upon God to provide. A benefit is that we learn financial discipline. We learn to put off spending and to budget our expenses. However, there comes a point for many tithers when they can tithe and still be enslaved by money, where they can tithe but not have their life focused on building God's kingdom, where they can tithe but begin focusing on themselves rather than God's kingdom. Tithing begins an economic partnership with God that brings financial blessing, but Christ calls for a total partnership where everything is surrendered

and available for the father's work. That's the focus of Christ's teaching. You have a father who wants you in his business. When the Spirit of the Father gets a hold of your heart, you'll desire to be in his business. You'll hunger to do what Jesus does.

If you are struggling from paycheck to paycheck, tithing is a powerful step to freedom. However, if you are tithing and comfortable and if you find yourself resenting all the requests you receive, watch your soul. A false god has his claws on you and is set to make you a slave.

In Luke 6, Jesus commands his followers to give. "Give," he tells them, "and it will be given to you..." Then he asked them this question.

Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. (Luke 6:39-40)

Jesus confronted his disciples with who was controlling their attitude and financial actions. Who is leading you? Someone is. Today, the advertising agencies of Madison Avenue among others are trying to lead us. Are we being led by what our neighbors and friends possess? Are we being led by what Hollywood tells us is cool? Are we being led by blind people? Or, are we acting with the heart and vision of our teacher and leader Jesus? Is our father's kingdom primary? Does his kingdom have our heart?

Your checkbook reveals the truth. It reveals what you value. It reveals what you treasure. Moreover, where you put your money, your heart will soon follow. Remember, it doesn't really matter whether you are good in your own eyes. You aren't the judge. What matter is whether Christ really has your heart and your confidence? Are you growing in the faith, vision and heart of Christ? What's the truth about you, and what do you need to do with your money and your life to follow Christ?