

When You Believe in God but Trust More In Money

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[0 : 0 0] It's harvest. I had a friend, he thought he was a farmer and what he did is he bought himself a brand new four by four. He bought some hunter wellies, a very nice barber jacket, a place in the country, four chickens and two goats. He could tell you about European subsidies and how tough it was to be a farmer. He really was a full-time London financier.

I met a man on a beach once in Spain. He wanted to sell me a Rolex watch for £30. That's what he said. Honestly, a Rolex watch for £30. He had a row of them all up his arm. Now, I'm not a connoisseur of Rolex watches, but I can tell you that a Cosmograph Daytona costs in excess of £51,000 if you buy a proper one. Our theme this morning is the Christian atheist, is when you believe in God, but trust more in money. And it isn't just Donald Trump that talks about faking it. You see, in the Bible, there's a man called Timothy who gets a letter from his mentor, Paul. And in the letter, Paul tells him to watch out for people who act holy but don't get their holiness from Jesus, but from the stuff that they have and the stuff that they've done.

And Paul called this kind of religious devotion a kind, a form of godlessness, meaning it's exactly the opposite of what it's meant to be. It's fake.

He was telling Timothy to watch out for people who fake it with their faith. It's like identity theft. People who say they are Christians yet live like they don't know him or serve him. And the early church was pretty well and down through history very much the same. Christians who fake it day by day.

[2 : 0 4] It's harvest Sunday. And if your head is full of tractors, furrows, plows, wheat sheaves, I want to introduce you to my gran's front garden. Imagine if you can her small piece of ground outside the front of her council flat. My gran had flowers in her front garden throughout the year.

It was a joy to see daffodils in November, snow drops in October, and tulips throughout the year, all courtesy of brands of washing powder in the 1960s.

My gran was a fake gardener. And it didn't fool me as a six-year-old. They didn't smell like the real thing. They certainly didn't feel like the real thing. And they certainly didn't look like the real thing.

The one thing she never had to do was to sow or reap. She just faked it.

And Paul, like a wise brother, gives Timothy some advice and says, Timothy, don't fake it. Because the true way of being authentic and honest and knowing the real thing, but it starts with a but. But godliness with contentment is great gain.

If you recognize the words in today's scripture, it's probably because you've been to a funeral or two. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. And liturgy adds to it in the funeral service and the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. You see, the Lord God Almighty doesn't have to fake anything. What he gives, he gives generously, yet it comes with a warning. And the warning is here. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap that many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and to destruction. And people in general, me included, often get prickly when the church talks about money. And we take a consumerist view because that's the way we live. It's hard-earned and it's mine to choose what I do with it. But under the lens of scripture and Jesus' teaching, that's faking it. Because that's about as far from the truth of the gospel truth that you can get. And I think it's true to say that most people in the last few days of your life, if you are fortunate enough to know it's the last few days of your life, don't talk about money and possessions. They talk about the things that are really, really precious.

[5 : 1 6] which is about their faith, their family. They talk about their loving memories. They talk about sometimes for peace and forgiveness for the things that have been said and done.

And in many cases, just ending well as they prepare with their face-to-face encounter with God. They don't have to fake anything. And why would we? Greg, in the book, puts it very much like this.

I always told myself that one day, when we have a certain amount saved, then I'll feel secure. Yet each time I crossed that imaginary line of security, my line moved. What before seemed like more than enough suddenly didn't feel like close to enough. After serious prayer and reflection, I realized what I was doing. I was placing my trust in money instead of in God. And I talked to Amy, this is his wife, about it. And she agreed. We have enough. We have way more than enough. If we can't be happy with that of what we have, there's something seriously wrong and sick about us. Here's what's surprising. It was easy to do. When my Christian atheist let go of those false promises of worldly pleasures, it was easier for me to pursue God. [6 : 53] And pursuing God, I became strangely content. And that was enough. What is enough for us? What is being content look like for us?

I used to laugh to myself when scripture talked about a cheerful giver, because I think on the whole that my attitude as a Christian atheist certainly didn't reflect that joyful attitude about giving. statistics show that many Christians give less than 2% of their monthly income to their local church. But I can choose who I give my money to. I can do that. And there's lots and lots of worthy causes out there.

But as it's Harvest Sunday, 2% doesn't buy a lot of seed. And we wonder why many churches see very little harvest.

Because their congregations haven't been serious about investing in the sowing from their local church. Sadly, it's common for many Anglican and Methodist churches to have less congregation than 30 people this morning in their congregation.

[8 : 13] They haven't invested. And in many cases historically weren't challenged to invest in sowing. And wonder why there are no young families or real spiritual growth in their fellowships.

Paul is talking to a younger Timothy. And it's clear for him, this is what he is saying. You need to sow lavishly into your community. The people that were called to serve, the people that were called to reach.

It is not about ourselves. And if you need a sharing harvest analogy today, I'll give you one. Because Jesus used a great one. And it was from Luke 12.

And when he was asked, he said, he told this parable. The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. And he thought to himself, what shall I do?

I have no place to store my crops. Then he said, this is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones.

[9 : 24] And then I will store my surplus grain. And I will say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years.

Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, you fool. Because this very night, your life will be demanded from you.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, which is not rich towards God.

What does it look like being rich towards God? Craig, in this chapter, when you believe in God but trust in more and money, reminds us that the church is the hope of the world.

And as God's chosen people, us, we are to be called an instrument of blessing for more than 2,000 years. And that is our purpose.

[10 : 35] And that is our purpose. To bring people to Christ. To help them discover their purpose. And to work as one body to bring the gospel to every nation.

And if you know the vision of Christ's church, you will know that's not far from the vision of why we exist and why we live. You see, it's about the local church.

And if that is God's instrument, that is you and me, then we need to start digging deep and realize that sowing, reaping, and harvest, what it's really all about. To embrace, to give thanks for his generosity, and to liken ourselves to that.

Our ministry and our lifestyle should show that which flows out of the local church. Why? Because he showed us how it was done.

And we are one body. And we should be one body in our giving and our sharing as well. We will share communion in a minute. We acknowledge we are one, we live as one, and we share as one.

[11 : 44] That's what the church is. And our giving to him, to his church, and those who we serve should reflect that. That we give as one, one pot.

The local church does what he asks us to do and what is said in scripture in Acts 2. You see, there is so much going on that we can do and can do, but so much more.

Transforming lives for good is bringing hope to so many. The food bank, Andrew House, is bringing so much to so many. I don't know whether you've watched Debt Saviors.

If you did, if you haven't, watch it on iPlayer. £1.29 is all she had left on her meter on a Friday to see her through to a Monday.

£1.29. And when that ran out, there was no electricity and there was no food in the kitchen. If the church is to be the local hope, then as Craig says, we aren't talking about people who are just asking to make hens meat.

[12:52] We are people who are struggling to pay rent, to buy clothes, feed their children, and even feed themselves. That's who we should be extravagantly serving.

And he challenges us in the book. And if you read it, and it challenges me, how does that fit? How does that fit with my new kitchen? How does that fit with my grand extension?

How does that fit with my data plans, my digital cables, my eating out as a matter of convenience, my expensive and extensive holidays, they bear no proportion to giving to the body?

I'm going to be comfortable with that face-to-face conversation. I don't think I am. Which challenges me to do something about it now.

In my curacy, people would do the Malachi 1.8. And it says, please don't bling me, your blemished lamb. People would bring along to the offering to the altar, the lamb that had a leg hanging off.

[13:57] It was twitching, and it was nearly ready to go. You are supposed to bring to the Lord your best. In my curacy, people would say, oh, we've just got a new carpet being laid.

Would the church like the old one? We've just got a new TV. The old one's a bit on the blink, but would the youth group like it? You know?

The Christian atheist says, sure, I'll give as long as it doesn't lower my personal standard of living. And it's a tough call. It's no point faking it.

We bring nothing into the world. And my children, no matter how much or how little I accumulate, can't take it out any more than I can.

And if that's what we're saving for. I looked at the planner for this service series, and I thought, great. I get the least popular area in which to preach.

[14:57] There's no one going to send me cards saying, what a great preach on Sunday, Clive.

That was great. I've just sold my holiday home, and here's a check for the church to do with it what they like.

And do with it as the Lord sees fit, just as they did in the book of Acts. But I'm really sorry this morning if you wanted me to stand here and talk about wheat, tractors, farmers, and nice woolly sheep in a field.

Because if you wanted me to do that, I'd have faked it. And to say that we should all do our own thing and pretend that Scripture doesn't apply to us, then comes the but.

I'll end where we started. But godliness with contentment is great gain. To sow, reap, and sow, sow, and reap.

And I know, I know, because we are the richest people in the world compared with others. And I know what a gracious heart means to a God who gave me so much in the first place.

[16:16] That surely I need to have that contentment in giving it back. In seeing others come to Christ. And in sharing what they do.

I will end with a story from the book, which if you're reading and following the series, probably would have touched your heart as much as it touched mine.

Craig goes with a group from his church to Honduras, where they build homes for people in need.

Our translator took our leaders into the home of a single mum.

To call it a home is really a gross overstatement. It was barely a shack, mostly built from cardboard.

Five people lived in the space about the size of our en-suite bathroom.

It had dirt floors, no running water, a hole in the backyard to take care of your business. It was so dirty that it made me nervous when the sweet lady served us lunch.

[17:23] With a warm smile and more hugs than I'm used to, she placed some food of meat in front of me. Not wanting to insult her, I ate the meat-like substance, praying with each bite for God's protection.

When we finished our sparse meal, my translator asked if I noticed that no one else had meat. Once he mentioned it, the truth hit me.

Every other plate had been covered with beans and tortillas. He explained that she had been told how much I like meat. Tears started to roll down my cheeks as he explained that she never enjoyed meat herself and that she had saved her money for months to bless me with that meat.

We Christian atheists are slaves. The Honduran woman is truly free. Why is it that those who have so little often seem to have so much?

Why do those with so much seem to have so little that really matters? This woman who had nothing sacrificed to give a guy who had everything.

[18 : 37] Although she had none of the things we chase after every day, she had everything we lack. Peace, contentment and true joy in the Lord.

I'd give all my money to be more like her. Amen. Amen. Mei.

Here we go. We win. We win. Just wait.