

THANKSGIVING SUNDAY - The Gospel and Money

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[0 : 00] Friends, I'll pray just while we remain standing. Father, we pray that you would speak to us through your word today, that we might shape our lives by it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, it was the days of King Joash, and the king ordered that all the dedicated money people had given would be used to repair the temple. However, the priests of this time didn't follow Joash's edict, and so Joash took this box, and he bought a hole in it, and he placed it beside the altar, and he said that whenever the amount grew, the king's secretary and the high priest would take it away, and they'd count it, and they'd tie it up in bags, and they would use it to pay people to repair the temple.

Many years later, Jesus sat opposite the treasury, and he watched people bringing money for the temple, and presumably this was a carry-on from Joash's day, and many rich people were bringing large sums, in fact, huge sums of money.

And then Jesus noticed this poor widow, and she dropped two copper coins, two small copper coins, into the receptacle, and Jesus noticed, and he called his disciples, and he said to them, Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of those contributing to the treasury, for all of them contributed out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, all that she had to live on.

Friends, today, on Thanksgiving Sunday, I want to speak to you about money. Now, you know, it's often hard for a clergyman to speak about money, because they're beneficiaries of your giving, but I'm not scared of doing it, because the Bible talks about it, and therefore it's part of what I need to teach you about.

[2 : 05] But I want to tell you that what I'm going to do today is a little different than from usual. That is, normally I'd just follow through a passage. I'm not doing that today. Today, I'm going to say some things from all over the Bible, and from one particular passage, the one that we read, the topic is more thematic, and since I've preached closely on this text last year, you can go and listen to it from the website if you like, but I'm going to preach just slightly differently from it.

If you have the outlines, I'd encourage you to follow it, because this is a more technical sermon, and you might find the outlines helpful. But just to give you, if you find it hard to follow everything, then the great thing is that I put it on paper, and you'll find as you walk out of church there, and outside the office, you'll find a little version of it called Gospel, Ministry, and Money Matters, and feel free to take one of those if you'd find that helpful.

I promised it last year, so it's finally arrived. So the first thing I want to say today as we talk about money is money is just part of life, isn't it?

Since God is the author of life, he has some things to say about money. He knows the world we live in, he has an interest in our lives and how we live them, and so it's inevitable that he's going to talk about money, just as he talks about everything else in life.

My second point that I want to start off with is that the Bible seems to indicate that money is a great litmus test. In other words, it's a way of your money is a way of indicating where your interests lie.

[3 : 42] The way you use money speaks about you. The way I use money speaks about me. It speaks about the things that are important for us. It speaks about our interests and our desires, and that's why Jesus links money with our hearts.

In Luke chapter 12 verse 34, listen to what Jesus has to say. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What Jesus is saying is that what we do with our money shows us where our heart is.

What we spend our money on shows us where our treasure is, where our values are, where our confidence lies. Jesus is clear. Wherever you find your money, there you'll find your heart also.

I don't think he means actually in the bank, but nevertheless, it's that idea. Can you see what he's saying? He's saying where your money lies, what you do with your money, shows you where your heart is. And it is so true.

Third thing I want to say is that the Bible makes clear that money can be a great force for great good. It can also be a great force for great evil.

[4 : 49] But let me talk for a moment about it being a great force for great good. I want you to think about it. Money is used to support the Lord Jesus in his ministry. Money is used to prevent people from being dependent upon others in the New Testament.

Money in the New Testament is used to support gospel preachers and therefore bring people into the kingdom. It can therefore be a force of great good. When people use this money, money this way, they show where their hearts are.

Their hearts are in gospel ministry. Paul makes this clear in 1 Timothy chapter 6. So if you open your Bibles with me, please. 1 Timothy chapter 6.

And we're going to read verses 17 to 19. So I shouldn't really have to tell you what the page number is, but if you're really searching for it, it is on page 966.

So 1 Timothy chapter 6. And I'm going to read verses 17 to 19. As for those who in this present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

[6 : 01] They are to be good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus saving up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Can you see what he's saying? He's saying, when you're instructing people, tell them to put their heart in the right place, and then to show that in their use of money. So this is the third thing we learn about God, from God, about money.

The fourth thing is that while money can be a force for great evil, it can also be a force, sorry, for great good, it can also be a force for great evil. For example, just think about the gospel records.

Judas betrays Jesus for what? Money. The Jewish ruling classes use money for what? To bribe Judas to do it.

James tells us of how the rich use money to deprive and manipulate the poor. And Paul reminds us of all of these things again in 1 Timothy 6.

[7 : 02] Have a look at it there. Just flip back a few verses or to the preceding page. Verses 9 to 10. Paul tells us of the power of money for evil. You see the greatest evil that money can do?

It can lead you away from the faith. That is the greatest evil that can happen. But let's think about this fifth thing that God has to say in his word. You see, when Jesus teaches his followers about money, he makes clear that it is difficult to be wealthy and part of the kingdom.

In Mark 10 verse 35, Jesus says that entering the kingdom, if you are wealthy, is like a camel going through the eye of a needle. Now I'm sure eyes of needles were a bit larger in the first century, but they are still pretty small, and it would still be very hard to get a camel through them.

It is very, very difficult. And the reason that it is difficult for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom is that wealth never comes on its own.

Often wealth is inextricably linked with power, with self-confidence, with self-sufficiency, with pride. And all of these things are the exact opposite of the things you need in order to enter the kingdom and to grow in the kingdom.

[8 : 39] However, I need to just balance this out a little bit. It is important to not forget that wealth can also be used for great good. And so, although Christians have often viewed wealth as an indicator of great ungodliness, that is unfair and untrue.

In the life and ministry of Jesus, in the whole of the Bible, and throughout Christian history, people of wealth have often been people of great generosity. They have sometimes been people of great godliness.

They have sometimes used their wealth for good and godly reasons. I have some of these in my own family. For example, if you go around all of Melbourne, you'll find these places dotted with buildings that have been donated by some men called the Griffith Brothers.

Some of you will know them from Griffith Brothers T's. St. Hillary's Q, Ridley College, St. Andrew's Hall next door, all were founded on Griffith Brothers money.

They were wealthy men, two brothers, but they gave their wealth in order to foster gospel causes. So, it is not true that to be wealthy is to be opposed to Christian causes.

[10 : 05] There is nothing wrong with wealth in itself. It is the risk of wealth that is the thing to worry about. So, let's now move on and I want to tell you about the foci of spending your money in the New Testament.

That is, the New Testament gives you some advice as to what foci you need to have when you think about what to do with your money. And the first thing that the New Testament says is that you should make sure that you use your money to care for yourself and for those who are close to you so that you will not be a burden on others.

If you've got your Bibles there, have a look at 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 6 to 13. So, 2 Thessalonians 3, 6 to 13. Paul warns the Thessalonian Christians against idleness and against being a burden to others.

He says, Work quietly and earn your own living. And then in 1 Timothy 5, verse 8, he says, Those who don't provide for their families have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers.

That's an incredible statement, isn't it? Those who do not provide for their families have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers. You see, it's a great thrust in the New Testament.

[11 : 19] Look after those who are yours. So, there's the first focus. Second focus in our use of money in the New Testament is on the poor. The Christians of the New Testament inherited the Old Testament's interest in the poor.

They saw that God reaches out to the poor and helps the disadvantaged. They wanted to be like the God they worshipped. And so, they worked on reaching to the poor and helping the disadvantaged.

And when they did this, New Testament Christians thought that you did it to the closest ones to you. In other words, you cared for the poor within your own congregations and the poor within the faith.

In Paul's words in Galatians 6 verse 10, whenever they had opportunity, they were to do good to all, but especially those who are of the household of faith. Here at Holy Trinity, we want to do this.

And so, I know that there are people among you here at Holy Trinity who keep an eye on the poor in our congregation and on those who are disadvantaged. And you help them, sometimes financially, sometimes in other ways.

[12 : 20] And we as a congregation actively promote support of Christian brothers and sisters who are disadvantaged. This is one of the reasons why we promote prayer and support for our sisters and brothers who are being persecuted.

Friends, as you think about your money, think about how you might be followers of God in reaching out to the poor and the disadvantaged and to be particularly focused on how you might reach out to poor and disadvantaged Christians.

Third focus for giving money in the New Testament is preachers of the gospel. And this is where it gets really a bit dicey for me. So you can just put up with this for a moment because the thought appears to go something like this in the New Testament.

Every person should work so that they may not be a burden to others. However, there is a work which is so important and so urgent that those who do it can rightly be a burden to others.

And that work is gospel work. So I am a burden to you though the Bible tells me not to be a burden to people. But I am a burden to you in order that I might dedicate my time to teaching people about the faith.

[13 : 34] So gospel preachers might put aside that right such as Paul did but that is their prerogative. It's up to them whether they put aside this right. Heather and I did this at one point. We were church planting in Perth and we were both working full time so that the church might not be burdened.

They might put money aside for the time when we left them and might then be able to fully support a pastor which they did. However, that was our choice. They wanted to pay us but we said, no, no, put your money in the bank.

Don't pay us. Paul makes it clear that ministers of the gospel should be supported by those that they minister to. In fact, Paul actually goes a little bit further than that. Have a look in your Bibles.

If you're still in 1 Timothy, flip back to chapter 5 verses 17 to 18. And we might have a look at it together. Chapter 5 verses 17 and 18. Paul says these words.

Now, it's interesting being compared to an ox, isn't it, really?

[14 : 51] But what is being said is this. When an ox is treading out the grain, you don't stop him from putting his head down and eating some of it.

Why? Because it's the natural thing and it's what he's working on. And so what he's really saying is gospel workers, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching, are worthy of double honour.

Why? Well, because they're doing what is essential for the people of God. So care for them and as it were, let them have some of the benefits of their work. So, and in doing that, you show a commitment to gospel ministry, I might say.

There are some broad principles about money from the Bible and its use. The Bible has lots more to say, but I thought these were good starters for us today. Now, I want to look at some specific and practical advice about giving money from the Apostle Paul in the passage we read.

So I wonder if you could turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. And just a little bit of background about this. In chapter 16, verses 1 to 4, Paul had already told the Corinthians, put aside some money once a week for the purpose of a collection for the poor.

- [16 : 03] In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, he spells out his thinking on the issue of how you give and what should be involved. And the crucial aspect of his argument can be summarised along the following line.

So follow it with me in your Bibles. In look at chapter 8, verse 9, Paul says, Now actually, it's good to have a more literal translation.

The English Standard Version puts it this way. Listen for the difference or watch for the difference. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

I wonder if you can see what Paul is saying. He's telling us, here is the theological background for all of your giving, and it is what? God's grace. You see, Christ was God.

He dwelt with God in all eternity. However, for our sake he left the security of heaven. He put off the privileges of divinity. He became poor for us.

- [17 : 13] He became a human and died for us. And he did this in order that we might be brought back to God. This is God's indescribable grace toward us, as Paul says at the end of 2 Corinthians 9.

And this indescribable grace should form the backdrop for all of our thinking and acting as Christians, especially in the area of money. God is the God of grace and generosity.

And what do you think the appropriate response to a God who's generous is? It's to offer yourself to God. That's the first thing to do. So flip back in your Bibles to chapter 5 verse 15.

Chapter 5 verse 15. Look at what Paul says. Speaking about Christ, he says, Christ died for all so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them.

What's the first thing you do when God gives his indescribable gift? You say, God, I offer myself to you. I offer myself to you for you who died and was raised for me.

- [18 : 18] And then Paul says that is to filter down into every corner of your life, including the way you use money. And that's what chapters 8 and 9 about. And according to Paul, this is exactly what the Macedonian Christians did.

Look at chapter 8 verses 1 to 5. Look at what Paul says. He says of them, We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God. Did you hear the word grace?

That has been granted to the churches of Macedonia. For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For I can testify that they voluntarily gave according to their means and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints. And this, not merely as we expected, they gave themselves first to the Lord and by the will of God to us.

Can you see? They gave themselves to the Lord first and then they gave themselves to their fellow Christians and then they gave what was necessary, which is their money. You see, the Macedonian Christians had understood the gospel.

- [19 : 24] They're like the, in fact, they gave out of extreme poverty. They're like the widow with her two copper coins. They'd seen God's grace and generosity and responded. The first thing they did is give themselves to God.

Then they found any way they could practically help just as God had helped them. God had seen their poverty and been generous. So where they can, they see others' poverty and are generous.

And they give help to Paul in his gospel ministry. But let's move on to attitudes in giving. Paul spells some of them out in the verses that follow. Look at chapter 9, verses 11 and 12.

Paul says this, and notice the words that are used. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

For the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. So today we're going to give you the opportunity to give money. Why?

[20 : 25] So that the recipients of it can be thankful to God for your generosity can burst out in thankfulness. But it's not only that, it's an expression of your thankfulness, of your saying, I give myself and everything I am to you.

So the first attitude Christians should have is one of generosity. Second attitude is one of free or voluntary giving. Look at chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. I'll read verse 7.

Each one of you should give us you've made up in your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. In 2 Corinthians 8, verse 3, it says the Macedonians voluntarily gave.

So Christian giving is generous and it's voluntary. No one is here whipping you and saying give. God is not doing that. It is voluntary.

But do you notice what other words are used here? Another attitude? It is that of cheerfulness. In other words, it's not inhibited by wrong motives such as unwillingness or cold, hard duty.

[21 : 30] No, on the contrary, it's done with a smile on your face. I had a friend who was an artist and he was really risky as an artist because he had this underlying thing that if you told him you liked a painting, he'd give it to you.

He would say, it's yours. Can you see why? He cheerfully gave things away as a way of expressing gratefulness for people's kindness, warmth, appreciation of his work.

Another attitude, chapter 8, verse 4. Of the Macedonians, Paul says, they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints. So it's not only jealous, not only voluntary, not only cheerful, it's eager.

People want to give. It is eager. It begs for the privilege of giving. It says, please let me give. Please let me give. It's so eager that it wells up in poverty as it did with the Macedonians.

Look at chapter 8, verse 2. For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

[22 : 43] They were like the widow. But let's read on in verse 3. Paul says this, For as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means and even beyond their means.

Friends, Christian giving gives even beyond its means. It gives extremely, even as God gives extremely in the giving of his son. But there's more.

Chapter 9, verse 8. Paul says, And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that by always having enough of everything you may share abundantly in every good work.

Can you see what Paul's saying here? He says, Christian giving is confident that God is generous. He's the God of grace and mercy. He always has our best interests in mind. He'll always supply our needs and how much more so our need to be generous.

He will supply that as well. So this passage supplies us with some Christian attitudes to giving. It also gives us some sensible guidelines. For example, while Christian giving should be sacrificial, it should also be according to our ability.

[23 : 51] Look at chapter 8, verses 11 and 12. Paul tells us that giving should be according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

You see, here at Holy Trinity, we don't expect people who are financially impoverished to give. Now please, please don't feel under any obligation if you are impoverished.

But let me tell you, we won't be surprised if you do because you are blessed by God and will want to be generous. Second, there should also be some sense of equality here.

You can see this in 2 Corinthians 8, 13 to 14. Third, the administration of church money must be fair, open, scrupulously honest and above board.

You can see that in verses 20 and 21. That's why I refuse to have any keys to anything that will let me at money. Not because I have a problem with money, I don't.

[24 : 51] But I will not touch money that is given by church members and I've told the wardens that I don't want to know who gives money and who does not. It is of no interest to me. What I'm more interested in is whether people are generous.

I want to be scrupulously honest in this area and take pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but in the eyes of the people. Friends, I wonder if I might close by just suggesting some practical tips for you in giving.

First, when you think about what money you're going to give, think of the gospel. Think of what God has done for you in Jesus. Think about his extraordinary grace toward us in giving up his son to death for us and our salvation.

We should be similarly generous. Two, as you think about giving money, stick to the priorities given in the New Testament. That is, care for those who are your own first. Give to the poor, especially poor Christians among us and elsewhere.

Give to gospel ministry. And when you're thinking about that, give first to those who minister to you than to those who minister the gospel elsewhere, our missionaries.

[26 : 04] My third practical tip is to set aside a proportion. The fundamental rule in Christian giving is that everything you have comes from God and that you should be generous as God is generous.

There's no rules about how much. Nevertheless, it's helpful, I think, as Christians who are still prone to sin and to selfishness to set themselves some guidelines that will help us be generous.

One of these guidelines is to set aside a regular amount. In the Old Testament, they reckoned a tenth was a good amount. Mind you, they gave little bits extra on it as well so they didn't glean the corners of their fields and they brought the first fruits of their harvest and so on.

My personal practice, I'll tell you, is to set aside 10% as a minimum and then to go beyond as I am able. And at various times we've been able to go well beyond, at other times we've had to cut back a little bit.

My fourth tip is to stick to it. The Bible is clear that when you give undertakings, you should stick with them. We are people whose word can be dependent because we are people who belong to a God whose word can be dependent upon.

[27 : 11] So a determination to stick with your word helps the vestry with planning and it helps us with planning. If we've undertaken to give a certain proportion of our income away, then do so.

The fifth practical tip is to be open to changes. We are all in changing situations, aren't we? Some of us will receive promotions at work. We'll have children move from being dependent independent or in need of education to being independent and no longer living at home or we'll finish paying off a mortgage or the like.

Others of us will be on the other side. Others of us will lose jobs, will have children or grandchildren that need special financial things or there'll be the need to move.

But other times we'll hear or there may be a GFC that has particularly struck us and we're totally dependent on money from that has been invested. At other times we'll hear of particular needs, either a short-term or long-term nature that we'd like to support.

We need to remain flexible enough so that we can review our commitments and adjust our giving in the light of these circumstances. Now a good time to review your commitments I think is at the beginning of a year or a tax time or maybe the AGM of the church.

[28 : 30] Sixth practical tip is to find a way that helps you. If you regularly attend Holy Trinity your financial giving is crucial to our ministry here. The first way to give is to just give what you can out of your purse or your wallet and put it in the collection plate or the box and then respond to particular needs as they become known.

This is the way many Christians give. However, let me tell you I've rarely seen that such giving is generous and it is rarely a reflection of a seasoned and prayerful reflection on God's great grace to us in Jesus.

It just is a reflection of what's in your wallet at the particular time. Others set up separate bank accounts in which they put money aside that they're going to give away and then at a certain time of the year they write a cheque or whatever.

That helps them. It's not a great help to the church because it's irregular but that doesn't matter too much. Others use the envelope system because they're used to it and it works really well for them.

However, the best means of giving to Holy Trinity if you want to do this is probably by automatic periodical payment from your bank account and there's information on how to do that every week in the newsletter.

[29 : 45] That allows planning by the parish generosity for you and puts it, well I do it because it takes account of my sinfulness, forgetfulness and irregularity. Well no, I'm not irregularly intending church but maybe you might be.

Also significantly, yes, so friends, I want to close by just telling you a story. I met this man in the closing years of his life. Some of you will know him.

His name was Paul White. He was otherwise known as the Jungle Doctor. He was a great and wonderful Christian man and he took me under his wings when I was in my late 20s and he mentored me.

I used to go and meet with him regularly at his home and we'd pray together and talk together. I remember one visit because as I was leaving he told me he would walk with me up the hill.

He lived in Linfield in Sydney and there was a steep hill. He said it was good daily exercise but he said there's something better than that. At the top of that hill there is a bakery and he said they sell great pies and he said I go up there every now and then and I buy one and I partake of one of the great pleasures in life, the pie.

[30 : 59] Anyway, he told me that in his view a pie was not a necessity in life. It was a luxury and because it was a luxury and not a necessity, whenever he bought a pie he would put aside an equal amount to gospel ministry.

He had made this a rule in life. Friends, I learnt so much from this man but I'll never forget this particular bit of advice. He was a man who loved God. He had been truly converted.

He loved Jesus and as he often told me the very last thing to be converted in a person's life is this thing. He told me time and time again and he's right.

It is your wallet or your purse. Friends, today I want to ask you if the way you use your wallet or your purse reflects what you've come to know of God and reflects your thankfulness to him for all that he has given you in Jesus.

Because the way you use your wallet reflects where your heart is. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for your amazing and indescribable gift of your son.

[32 : 15] Please help us to live as people truly thankful in every area of our existence. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.