

What Jesus Talked About the Most

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 21st Sunday after Pentecost, October 24, 1993. Scripture Lessons: Exodus 32:1-14; Matthew 6:19-21, 24.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I never took a class in business or economics in college. I learned just about everything I know about money from my fifth grade educated father. These are some of the things he taught:

"If we obeyed Jesus there'd be no poor or rich people."

"The doctor and the ditch digger would work hard and get paid the same. They'd work, not for the money, but to help ^{everybody else} ~~the whole community~~."

"People who had more money than they needed for food, clothing and shelter would lend to those in need without charging any interest."

He enjoyed telling a story about John D. Rockefeller, a story that may not even be true. "Rockefeller had so much money", he said. "he use to stand on a corner in New York City and hand it out to whoever came by." That's all he'd say. He didn't really make any application. He just smiled when he told it. What I got out of it is that the best thing you can do with money is give it away. There's real joy in giving money away.

My dad used to take me into a little corner grocery story in Wilmington. It was owned by a loud, laughing Polish man who talked with a thick accent. I think my dad went in there to talk as much as to buy things. They'd talk about the weather, about their families, and about economics and politics. One day I was leaning up against a soda machine and my dad and I were drinking a bottle of sassparilla. He was about to give me another lesson in economics. He held up the bottle and said

to me, "I could buy this soda two cents cheaper at that new super market they built at Prices Corner." I said, "Well, how come we don't get our sodas there?" He was waiting for that question. "If I lost my job and couldn't buy food", he said, "do you think the owner of that super-market would care if ~~I lost my job~~? But my Polish friend here, would be at our front door with groceries. He'd say, 'You can pay me back, Acky, whenever you have the money and if you need more, let me know.'"

Those are some of the things I learned from the Economics 101 class my dad taught me. What he taught could be summed up in a few short words: Follow the teaching of Jesus. Do your best, work hard, share joyfully and give generously. The emphasis was on giving, not getting.

My dad believed he got everything he taught me about money from the teachings of Jesus. Jesus had a lot to say about money. There's the story of the Rich Young Ruler. There's the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the parable of the Rich Fool. Jesus had more to say about money than just about anything else. He had more to say about money than repentance. He talked more about money than he talked about our need to be born again. He spoke more about money than heaven and hell. Jesus talked a lot more about money than about sex ethics. His emphasis was never on making money, but on giving it away.

Now I can't imagine Jesus ^{saying} saying, "Seek first a good job that pays a lot of money". He said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." He told his disciples, "Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your

goods, do not ask them again." He said, "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." These are just some of the things that Jesus had to say about money and possessions.

Today I read something else that Jesus said. He said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

We've all heard the saying 'you can't take it with you!' That's not a saying of Jesus. Jesus said that we can take it with us. He said it's possible to store up treasure in heaven. How do we ^{do} it? A clue is found in the answer that Jesus gave to the Rich Young Ruler. Jesus said, "Go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...." Again, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said to his followers, "Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven."

One way we store up treasure in heaven is to invest in the lives of people who are poorer than we are. ^{The treasures that we are storing up are not possessions and money but people and relationships.} Of course, we need to keep a certain amount of money in order to buy food and clothing and pay the rent or mortgage but Jesus wants us to free up as much as we possibly can in order to place it where the return is eternal; in ^{poor people who need above anything else to know Jesus and ~~his family~~ be welcomed into his family.} Maybe there's a needy neighbor next door. Maybe there's a famine in Somalia, an earthquake in China, a flood in the Midwest. There's always the opportunity to spread the gospel to people who've never heard about Jesus. There's a chance to

invest in the future of a bright young student who otherwise would ^{not} be able to go to college or seminary. I was really excited when I read in our old session minutes dating back to 1866 that the session authorized a special offering soon after the congregation got into their new church. They took up an offering to help build a Presbyterian Church in Absecon, New Jersey. We store up for ourselves treasures in heaven by giving away money in ways that will genuinely help others ^{know Christ and experience his love} and further God's gracious plans for this world.

Some people invest their money, not where they'll get the highest interest rate, but where their money will contribute to something of lasting value. In fact, I believe, as a Christian, putting our money in the stock market just to make ^{more} money is immoral. It's immoral to buy too many luxury items which don't create jobs and can't be used by anybody. We need to look at what our money is being used for. A Christian will ask, "How will my money be used? Will it be used in ways that will hurt people or help them? Will it help create jobs? Will it further the coming of God's Kingdom?"

When we give money to CROP to combat hunger or when we make a contribution to an AIDS walk to help find a cure we're investing in something that will have lasting value. When we make our pledge to the mission of the church ^{in terms of people who will be there} we're investing in something that will pay dividends in heaven. What we give will help to teach children and adults about God's love. It will also buy blankets for homeless people. It will buy food for the hungry. It will buy medicine for the sick. It will help to save the lives of people who have infinite value in the eyes of God.

Through our gifts people will come to know Jesus Christ, and be in heaven.

In 1984 I traveled to Guatemala to visit Presbyterian mission workers. Over half the population of Guatemala are descendants of the Mayans. Many have become Christians through the missionary work of our church begun in the late 1800s. I spent a day at a small poorly equipped Presbyterian hospital outside Quezaltenango. I met a doctor who spends her vacation in Guatemala every year healing people for free. I learned that what my father taught me about money was being followed there. Missionary doctors got paid the same as teachers and ministers and ^{mission agriculturalists,} ~~other workers~~. They're paid according to their needs, not according to their ^{of their jobs} status outside the church. It was exciting to see the teaching of Jesus being obeyed literally.

I spent another day at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of ~~Guatemala~~ in San Felipe. One hundred students are enrolled there. I compared that seminary to Princeton Seminary where I attended. When I was at Princeton a maid came in and made our beds every day. In Guatemala the students sleep on a pad on a cement floor. Princeton has a magnificent library with hundreds of thousands of books. Four bookshelves contained the library of the Presbyterian Seminary in Guatemala. Princeton has well equipped buildings but there wasn't even a bathroom that worked in the Guatemalan seminary (and I desperately needed one after eating a piece of pastry from the market place). I'm glad that some of the money we give through our church will go to help that hospital and seminary in Guatemala. I'd like to see a lot more of our money ^{freed up to go} going to missions.

Jesus Christ

When we give money to support the mission of ~~the church~~ we're storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We think a lot about the things we really treasure. If we treasure our money and possessions most of all, we'll spend a lot of time worrying about them. But if we treasure Jesus Christ, our hearts will be where he's ministering to people. Our hearts will be with him where he is, preaching the gospel to the poor; proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and letting the oppressed go free.

Do we really believe the Bible? Are we willing to live under the authority of Jesus Christ? Does our checkbook show it? If our life has been changed at all by Jesus Christ, I challenge all of us to pray about how you use your money. I urge you to take a step of faith remembering that where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

*Let us pray: Almighty God, may our pledge support of the Church's mission be a symbol of our trust in your providence and a witness to our devotion to Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of your holy name.
Amen.*

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Family of 4 \$14,335

Single Person \$ 7,143

OPC CHURCH DIRECTORY

121 Multiple person families (a)

261 Single Person units (b)

TITHE/ POVERTY LEVEL

\$ 1,434	\$ 7,14
<u>x 121(a)</u>	<u>x 261(b)</u>
\$173,514	\$186,432

Family of 4 to eat MacDonalds Meal Deal once a week= \$16

\$16 x 52 weeks x 250 Giving units at OPC (currently have envelopes
or give regularly)

\$208,000