

Introduction



We began the year by acknowledging that we are all part of God's unfolding plan of salvation. We are recipients of God's grace and also the conduits through which God's grace flows as the Holy Spirit empowers. This is so that God is honoured in and through us i.e. His kingdom is deepened and extended

To help us in our continuing walk with God, we began the year by looking back to earlier chapters in God's story, to learn more about His character and purposes. Accordingly, we considered the story of the Exodus. We learnt about the establishment of the Covenant, how God brought freedom to His people and what God required of His people at that time in their relationship with Him and others.

Acknowledging that all of scripture points to Jesus, during Lent and after Easter, we considered the freedom that Christ brings through His death and resurrection – the creation of the New Covenant in which we live today.

As recipients of God's grace, as citizens of the kingdom of God, we have responsibilities to God. One responsibility is how we consider money and how we honour God in our attitude to giving to resource His kingdom through the local church and other agencies.

Therefore, we now begin a 3 session teaching series in which we consider our responsibilities to Christ in terms of resourcing the kingdom financially.



Sermon 1: Honouring The King

Ice breaker:

In what situations, do we use the word "honour" in daily life?

Study: Read Mark 10:17-23 (see Helpful Hints for answers)

1. How is the person described in the passage?
2. In verse 17, what title did he give to Jesus?
 - a. What are the implications of the man's misunderstanding of Jesus' identity?
 - b. How does this apply to us today?
3. Why do you think Jesus answered as He did in verse 18?
4. Read verse 21. Why did Jesus say what he did to the man?
5. How does this passage speak to you today?

Helpful Hints:

1. We learn that the person is "man" (verse 17) who had "great wealth" (verse 22). Reading the passage, it is clear that he was eager to meet Jesus and that he had a real spiritual interest e.g. He "ran", "fell on his knees" and wanted to know how "to inherit eternal life?"

In parallel passages, we learn that Luke describes him as a "ruler" (Luke 18:18) which probably meant that he was a member of an official council or court. Matthew also describes him as "young" (Matthew 19:20).

2. The man described Jesus as "Good Teacher." Remembering his position in the social hierarchy, this ascription together with his extraordinary act of deference (i.e. falling to his knees – although did he really mean this? Was it a tactic to impress Jesus and people around?), indicates both respect and acknowledgement that Jesus can help him by teaching him something. His question that follows reveals that he wants to find the answer from Jesus. This suggests that he has been intrigued by Jesus and that he is spiritually open and dissatisfied with the Jewish faith.
 - a. By calling him Teacher, the rich young man has not understand who Jesus is. He is the Messiah and not just a religious teacher. A teacher cannot grant salvation but the Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour can and does.

Furthermore, the man would respond to a teacher differently to the Messiah. This is at the heart of this encounter. Who is Jesus to us? And what are the implications?

3. Through his reply, Jesus was not denying his own goodness but:
 - forcing the man to consider who He really was
 - the implications of this to his life and
 - that the only hope for the rich young man to receive salvation was to accept Him as Lord and so surrender everything to God.
4. Notice how Jesus engaged with him and “loved him.” He recognized the man’s earnestness. His response was not intended to shame him by exposing his failure to understand the spiritual depths of the commandments but was an expression of genuine love. Jesus always spoke the truth in love.

The one thing that was holding the man back from knowing God and being at peace was his refusal to sacrifice everything to God. The obstacle was his attitude to his personal wealth. Jesus was lovingly challenging the man to give his heart to God not to the world. We cannot serve two masters.

5. If Christ is our Lord, we are to be willingly obedient and dependent on Him. This applies to our attitude to money and giving to the work of the kingdom in and through the local church and other agencies. The apostle Paul develops this teaching in his writings, for example in Corinthians, e.g. 2 Cor 8:7

Some background principles of Christian stewardship to set you thinking and talking:

God owns everything. Accordingly, we are simply stewards of all that belongs to God. We been entrusted to glorify Him and build His kingdom by honouring Him with our time, talents and money.

We are accountable to God for how we steward His blessings.

God is generous

God delights in the giver who gives cheerfully and sincerely. Our attitude matters.

God demands the best.

It is a privilege not just a duty to give to support the work of God.



Sermon 2: Investing in the Kingdom

Background:

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus often taught in parables, using everyday situations that people understood at the time, to help them understand His teaching. Frequently, Jesus used parables to reinforce what he had just taught, so looking at what precedes a parable is important. What's more, Jesus sometimes taught one parable after another, to indicate how important his teaching was and to ensure that people understood (e.g. Luke 15: lost sheep then lost coin and then lost son).

In this episode, Jesus is en route to Jerusalem and his crucifixion. Opposition to him is mounting. As he approaches journey's end, Jesus is focusing his teaching on the kingdom of God and salvation.

This parable immediately follows the conversion of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Zacchaeus is transformed by coming to faith in Christ and immediately and voluntarily then gives his wealth away for the kingdom. His focus in life is changed and he honours God through his joyful giving to the work of God. Jesus replies, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too is a Son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

The text continues, *"While they were still listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable..."*

Ice breaker: Can you think of a time when you feel that you did not make the most of something?

Study: Read Luke 19: 11-26 (see Helpful Hints)

Notes:

- A mina was equivalent to 3 months wages at this time.
 - This is a parable not an allegory.
 - This parable is also told in Matthew 25:14-30 but with a slightly different emphasis.
1. What do you think is the point that Jesus is making in this parable?
 2. What are some of the reasons that people may give for failing to honour God by investing their time, talents and resources in building the kingdom of God?
 3. Throughout scripture and in Christ, we learn that two foundational characteristics of a follower of God are surrender and obedience. In

Christ, we also learn that there is joy and blessing in giving away to bless others and to build the kingdom. Share your thoughts on this.

Conclusion:

Take some time to think and with the help of the Holy Spirit, to consider if you are living a fully surrendered life to God. This is an important exercise so please devote time and prayer in the week ahead. You may like to speak to a trusted Christian friend or member of the clergy in confidence. Act on your reflection so that you may know the Lord's peace in His fullness.

Helpful Hints:

1. In the kingdom of God, all citizens have been blessed by God. These blessings are to be invested for the continuing development of the kingdom. As we honour God willingly, blessings will follow (verses 17, 19 & 26) but this is not the reason for honouring God. No – we surrender and work for the Lord willingly and joyfully in response to His love for us. What's more we are accountable to the Lord for the decisions and actions that we make and take with all that He has entrusted us with (verse 26).

This explains the different emphasis that Luke gives to this parable compared to Matthew. The emphasis in Luke's account, where all the servants receive the same amount from the nobleman in his account, is that all Christians share in the same privilege – of living out our faith for God by using all our God given blessings for Him.

2.
 - a. Fear (e.g. verse 21). This arises from a misunderstanding of who the Lord is.
 - b. Disobedience (e.g. verse 24)
 - c. Pride or disdain – perhaps the reason for b. above
 - d. Indifference/apathy
 - e. Ignorance or misunderstanding
 - f. Low self-esteem - considering oneself unworthy to be able to contribute anything to the work of God
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Sermon 3: The Generosity of the King's Subjects

Sermon Date: May 13, 2012

This is the concluding sermon in our mini-series entitled 'Kingdom Privileges'.

May I encourage members of the Housegroup to collect a copy of the Vision Sunday report and the recently published church accounts.

Background:

A key part of Paul's apostolic ministry in the mid 50's AD was his organization of a collection of money to relieve the poverty of the church in Jerusalem. The collection did more than relieve poverty. By making a generous and sacrificial financial gift to the Jerusalem church, the new gentile churches affirmed their partnership with the Jewish Christians in building the Kingdom of God.

In our study today, Paul is writing to the church that he planted in Corinth. Their early enthusiastic commitment to giving to this collection seems to have fizzled out. What's more, we learn that were financial tensions caused, it seems, by Paul refusal to accept patronage and instead to work to his ministry. Problems were made worse by false teachers denying Paul's authority as an apostle. Given the breakdown of relationships and a delicate situation, Paul could be forgiven for not pressing an issue that was as sensitive as money - but he did! A full two chapters (2 Corinthians 8 & 9) are devoted to teaching about financial stewardship as he urged the Corinthians to complete the collection as part of their ongoing spiritual formation as well as for supporting God's work in Jerusalem.

Paul's focus was not the money: in the two chapters Paul never used the word 'money' once – or any other financial word – although his teaching is all about financial giving. Instead, he intentionally chose words such as privilege, service or generous act. These are all English translations of the single Greek word *charis* meaning 'grace'. Paul makes the profound point that it is a grace to give to support the work of the kingdom of God through the local church. Giving financially to resource the work of God is a grace. We give in response to receiving the grace of God through Christ.

Ice breaker: Can you remember an occasions(s) when you have been blessed by the generosity of someone? How did you feel? How did you respond?

Study: Read 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15

Questions:

1. Read 2 Corinthians 8: 1-5. What do we learn about the circumstances of the Christians in Macedonia and their Christian discipleship?
2. Looking at verses 2-5 & 12, explore the difference between a sense of obligation and a sense of privilege. What difference does this make to your understanding of giving financially and in the wider sense (e.g. our time and talents)?
3. Read verse 7. What do you think about Paul's encouragement to "...also excel in the grace of giving."
4. Read verses 8-12. Why do you think that Christians can fail to follow through in this foundational area of Christian discipleship - in giving financially? Reading the passage, how does Paul respond to this? Do you agree?
5. Read verses 13-15. Giving to support the ongoing work of Church in our locality and to others, is one way that we demonstrate our love for God (see Mark 12: 30-31 our motto verse) and develop unity and equality (i.e. peace) as His one universal church.

Given this, and all that we have considered in our three session series "Kingdom Privileges", consider sharing how your discipleship has been influenced in recent weeks?

Conclusion:

Invite everyone to take and read a copy of the recently published 2011 church accounts & Vision Sunday reports. (Note: These are available from the Church Office.)

Sensitively advise that forms to give by standing order are available in the West End and from the web site. Gift Aid envelopes are available in the chairs and pews.

Conclude with a time of prayer.

Helpful Hints:

2. In response to the grace of God revealed in and through Christ, it was a joy and a privilege for the Christians in Macedonia to give financially to support the ongoing work of God. It was a priority for them despite their "extreme poverty" (verse 2). They gave willingly, regularly,

generously and sacrificially to the ongoing work of God through the church.