

## MESSAGE – Making kingdom use of money

Read [2 Corinthians 8:1–7](#), [Luke 16:1–13](#)

Today's readings feature a topic that many of us feel uncomfortable talking about in church – namely **money**. But Jesus wasn't shy about the subject. Around two thirds of all his parables feature money and our attitudes towards money. So it seems that Jesus thought it was an important topic to talk about.

Despite what we read in the newspaper about Australia's struggling economy, we live in wealthy times. Australia has just recorded its 28<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of economic growth. If you rank Australia's population from least wealthy to most wealthy, the person in the middle of the line – the median Australian – is wealthier than the median person from almost any other country – which makes most of us very wealthy by global standards. So we are richly blessed. ... But that doesn't necessarily make us feel either secure or satisfied. One writer puts it like this:

... the fact is, I'm privileged. Most people I know are privileged ... sickeningly privileged. But privilege creates discomfort within me. Because while so many people all over the world live with fear, violence, oppression and persecution, we live with privilege, affluence and freedom. And yet, we still aren't satisfied. We're restless, impatient, unsettled, disappointed.

I long for contentment in what I have and where I live and who I am. I long to come to a place of rest, a place of stillness, where I am not lured by privilege and swayed by its fickle promise of unattainable satisfaction.

An interesting conversation is whether we are living out of a theology of **scarcity** or a theology of **abundance**. If we mainly live out of a feeling of scarcity we will try to cling on to what we have and may well become anxious about the future. On the other hand if we live from a feeling of abundance we are more likely to be generous and to freely share what we have. So ... are we living with a mindset of scarcity or one of abundance?

It's something to ponder ...

## Using money for selfish purposes and kingdom purposes

Today's parable in Luke 16 is considered puzzling by most commentators, but let's see if we can make some sense of it. First there is a **rich man**, a **very** rich man indeed given the size of debts owed to him. The original hearers of the parable would quickly label this man as the bad guy.

Then there is the **manager**, the one who handled the day-to-day running of this rich man's farming business. He is accused of **squandering** the rich man's property, which suggests he was taking a large cut of the profits for himself, perhaps by jacking up the amounts owed and then pocketing the difference. He's given the sack and wonders what he'll do now. He's not strong enough to be a labourer and is too proud to beg. What to do? He dreams up a clever plan ...

While he still has influence and power, he calls in all his master's debtors and reduces their bills – effectively removing his cut and probably reducing the master's profit. Rather than being mad with him, though, the rich landlord praises him for his shrewd scheme – using creative accounting to make new friends whom the manager hopes will now welcome him into their homes out of gratitude and look after him.

Jesus notes that such people are usually far smarter in doing such deals than God's people are. But here's the confusing part – does Jesus actually praise him for his dishonest dealing and suggest that he's a good model for us to follow?

I don't think so!

## So what does Jesus suggest is the right attitude towards money?

From this parable – and from other parables that Jesus taught – including the rich man and Lazarus that we'll hear next week – we can deduce the following:

- Wealth is a potential trap – we can become so obsessed with money and possessions that they can consume all our attention – how to keep what we've got – how to protect it from others. Strangely, being wealthy can make us less generous.
- Wealth may also blind us to the needs of the poor – we can become so busy enjoying the benefits of wealth and all it can provide – for ourselves and our own families – that we don't notice the people struggling around us – they're out of sight, out of mind – a bit like the homeless or asylum seekers
- Money can even become a rival god that we worship and which controls how we live. Temples to this god can be found in every large shopping centre from Chirnside Park to Eastland to Chadstone.

Jesus' solution to the dangers of money is simple but radical – use your wealth to help others.

- When you entertain, invite the poor, crippled and lame – who cannot repay you. In this way you'll store up treasure in heaven, as it is the poor who will welcome you into a heavenly home according to today's parable.
- When you become aware of a person in need, don't ignore them, but rather go out of your way to stop and help. That's what good neighbours do according to the story of the Good Samaritan. It's one reason we help support overseas charities and provide food for local food pantries.
- The real privilege of being wealthy – according to Jesus' upside down economics – is that you have the means and the responsibility to help others.

If only our governments could think and act like that ...!

## Walking the fine line

When I read this parable earlier in the week, I wondered how am I using the resources available to me as an individual ... but also to us as a community ... I hope that we're living out of an **abundance** paradigm – trusting in God's abundant provision to supply all we need – which is how the arrangement with Harrisons here at Gifford Village came about in the first place.

We've been blessed with a legacy from previous generations – and are working to leave a legacy to future generations. The question for us is how can we best organise our resources so that what Jesus calls the 'true treasure' – the message of the gospel and the building of God's kingdom – can continue on after we are no longer around?

I want to finish with John Wesley's helpful approach to money:

Do all the good you can.

By all the means you can.

In all the ways you can.

In all the places you can.

At all the times you can.

To all the people you can.

As long as ever you can.

As we keep these guidelines in mind, we will make kingdom use of the ambiguous blessing of money and wealth.

May God give us both wisdom and faithfulness.