



25 September – 01 October 2022

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

The Bible has a lot to say about money and how we use it. Our bank statements and budgets are important spiritual documents that reveal a lot about our priorities and our level of commitment to the principles of God's Reign. This week the readings challenge us to recognise that the material blessings we enjoy are not just given to us but are given *through* us to share with others. As we grow in obedience to the values and mission of God's Reign, we inevitably find ourselves becoming increasingly compassionate and generous, and we discover that whatever measure of wealth we possess can make a significant contribution to building God's Dream among us.

It's important to realise that our use of money is rooted in our attitude toward it. When we work to develop the Christ-like attitudes of humility, contentment, simplicity and love, we will automatically see our money not as an end in itself, or a source of security and happiness, but as a means to the end of building community, of seeking to spread blessing and sufficiency as widely as possible, and of manifesting the life of Jesus in our world.

This week we explore our attitudes toward, and our use of, money.

SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2022

Read: Luke 16:19-31

Reflect: The parable we read today is not about what happens after we die, and to apply this story to that question is to miss the point entirely. Jesus was addressing how we live in this life and, in particular, how we use our wealth and treat others. There are two surprising features of this story that drive the point home. The first is that, in a world where it is usually the rich and famous whose names are known, Jesus names the poor beggar and leaves the wealthy man nameless. This is an indication of where God's primary concern

lies. The second point to note is how, even in death, the rich man's attitude remained unchanged. He still expected Lazarus to serve him by bringing him water, and for his family to receive special treatment by having someone return from the dead to speak to them. The sense of entitlement, self-importance, and self-centredness that is often a by-product of wealth is clearly demonstrated here.

Notice that the parable does not blame the rich man for his wealth as such. The blame lies in that he denied Lazarus even the scraps from his table. The excess that he would not use and did not care about was kept from someone whose life would have been changed by it. This lack of compassion and kindness is shocking.

No matter how much or how little we may possess, we have no excuse for withholding compassion from another person. How can you grow in your capacity for compassion today?

Do: Compassion is about awareness. When we refuse to even notice those who struggle around us, our hearts are unable to respond with generosity and kindness. But, when we make the effort to notice the needs of others, we are automatically drawn to feel their pain with them. Today seek to be aware of others and to show compassion at every opportunity.

Pray: As you have noticed my need and shown me compassion, O God, teach me to show compassion to others.

MONDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2022

Read: Psalm 119:49-56

Reflect: Psalm 119 is a song of celebration for God's instruction given in the Law. It expresses the belief that the Law was intended to bring freedom and lead God's people into a deeper, richer life - not to restrict them. This is why Jesus declared that he had not come to reject the Law, but to fulfil it - to help people to return to its true spirit and meaning. In today's section of this long Psalm, the writer compares the way he has chosen to live with the lifestyle of the proud and wicked. Those who are proud - who base their lives on themselves and their own self-importance - look down on this writer who has chosen to follow God's ways. Yet even though he

sees how others reject God's ways, he finds life and joy in following God's Law.

When it comes to the question of money and wealth, the wisdom of our age seems to be that we need to have as much of it as we can accumulate for ourselves without any thought for how this impacts others. But God's way is to live simply and to give as much as we can in order to bring justice, equality, and sufficiency into our world. This is basically a change of heart - from self-centredness to kindness and interdependence. These attitudes won't win any praise from our society, but they will lead us, and those around us, to a richer, more sustainable, life.

How can you learn to rejoice in God's instructions about generosity and simplicity today?

Do: Kindness, compassion and generosity are rooted in the practice of thanksgiving. When we focus on what we don't have, it is hard to be generous, and it is easy to fall into habits of accumulation and self-centredness. But, when we focus on what we do have, and give thanks for it, we automatically begin to seek ways to share the blessing. Today, take a moment to think about all the good things you enjoy and give thanks.

Pray: For all the abundant goodness I enjoy, O God, I give you thanks.

TUESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2022

Read: James 5:1-6

Reflect: You may feel rather browbeaten after reading today's passage from James. This letter certainly doesn't use soft words as it challenges the wealthy. Notice that James was writing to Christians, so these tough words apply to anyone who is seeking to follow Jesus. We may not feel wealthy, but if we have access to sufficient food, a warm bed, and the Internet, we are among the wealthiest people in the world. So, as hard it may be to hear them, these words do, in fact, apply to us. We may not be exploiting workers, or spending our money on extravagant luxuries, but it is important that we recognise that the Gospel does challenge our attitudes to money, and to those in our world who do not have

enough to survive. James is clear that the cries of the poor are heard by God, and that our choices about how we use our money are spiritual, as much as practical, ones.

Notice the important truths that James stresses here. Money, when it becomes a focus of our energy and attention (an idol), eats away at our souls and our lives. Our wealth is temporary - ultimately the value of our possessions always becomes meaningless when we are faced with the big, eternal questions. This does not mean that money is unimportant. It is very important, and how we use it is a significant part of our discipleship. We are called to be stewards of what we have, which means that we are to take responsibility for our possessions, care for them, and use them for the sake of God's Reign - for justice and shared blessing in our part of the world.

How can you be more intentional about being a steward of your wealth today?

Do: When we recognise our responsibilities with regard to our money and possessions, we cannot avoid the call to give. Although we may sometimes feel that giving is a sacrifice that is hard in these tough times, giving is really a blessing which reminds us of the abundance we enjoy, and teaches us to trust the wisdom of God's Reign. Today, seek to be generous at every opportunity. If you are unable to be generous with your money, give of your time, your attention or your compassion.

Pray: O God, in gratitude for the abundance I enjoy, I seek to share what I have with those who are in need.

WEDNESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2022

Read: Matthew 19:16-22

Reflect: The story we read today reveals the battle that goes on in every heart between the values of God's Reign and the values of human society. The rich man who approached Jesus was not evil. He wanted to live rightly. The phrase "eternal life" does not refer to life after death here. For Jewish believers, it meant "the life of the age to come" which referred to the time when God's new order would be established on the earth. Jesus knew that this man, because of his wealth, was deeply invested in the systems of human

society, and so he would need to "disinvest" in order to give himself to God's Reign. So, Jesus challenged him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. The disappointed response shows that this man was not yet ready to give up the benefits of human systems and embrace Jesus' way. In contrast, it was often the poor who readily accepted Jesus' message because they had no investment in the status quo, and they had nothing to lose by embracing the ways of God's Reign.

This story is less about a specific action - selling everything - and more about a choice of where we invest our resources and our souls. If we live by the values of materialism, accumulation, and self-sufficiency, we are invested in the status quo of human systems. But, if we live by the values of simplicity, generosity, and interdependence, we are learning to be invested in God's Reign. This is what Jesus meant when he taught that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be.

Where are your resources invested - human systems, or God's Reign? What does this say about where your heart is?

Do: Whenever we are challenged by the ways of God's Reign, we may at first resist the conviction that it brings, and we may seek to justify ourselves. When we do this, our response actually keeps us from receiving and sharing God's life. A better response is to listen to the conviction, acknowledge where we need to change, and repent - change and do things differently. This is the work of confession. Today, try to open yourself to the Holy Spirit's conviction, and respond with humble confession.

Pray: Show me, Holy Spirit, where my heart is not invested in your Reign, and help me to change.

THURSDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2022

Read: Lamentations 3:19-26

Reflect: After this tough week, in which the Scriptures have challenged our allegiances and our use of money very strongly, we may be feeling a bit battered. In the light of this, the theme for this coming Sunday is a comforting change. The focus is on the power of small, seemingly insignificant, actions and attitudes for manifesting

God's Reign in our world. Of course, our use of our material possessions is an important part of how we live out the way of Jesus in our daily routines. But, beneath it all, we are called to develop our commitment to faith in God's presence and purpose, no matter what we may face in our circumstances. Today's reading from Lamentations is a good example of this. The prophet Jeremiah grieved the conquest of his homeland, and the exile of his people. Yet, in the midst of this great suffering, he affirms again the basis for his faith. God's faithful love never ends, and God's mercy never ceases. Therefore, he instructs himself to remember that God is his inheritance, and it is in God that he can hope. Because of this, it is good to wait quietly for God's salvation.

It is easy to underestimate the impact of living with the kind of trust that Jeremiah demonstrates here. When life is hard, or we face grief and trauma, or we walk alongside others who are suffering, and we maintain our faith in God's presence and care and continue to be faithful in our giving and service, our lives become a significant witness to God's salvation and love. When we remember and declare God's faithfulness and mercy, even in the worst of times, we are able to live with the generosity and openness that touches and blesses others, and the people around us notice and their lives are enriched. This is where the most important work of faith is done - not in grand gestures or dramatic actions, but in the simple attitude of trust and the kindness and grace that our lives show as a result.

How consistently does your life reflect your faith in God's faithfulness and mercy?

Do: One of the clearest ways that our faith in God's mercy is revealed is in our prayer life. When we continue to live prayerfully, filling our lives with conversation with God and trust in God's presence and ways, our faith is seen to be more than just an intellectual idea, but a foundation for our whole life. Today, no matter what you face, or whom you are with, allow your prayer to fill every moment and interaction.

Pray: Because your faithfulness never ends, O God, I pray and live in trust.

FRIDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2022

Read: Psalm 37:1-9

Reflect: The Psalms do not gloss over the struggles of living with faith. Many of these songs recognise that it can be hard to follow God's ways when faithless people around us seem to be doing so well. But the Psalms are clear that this is only really a problem if we see our faith as a route to comfort, security, and material prosperity. If we recognise that the gifts of faith are far more significant and life-giving than these temporal things, then, no matter what our circumstances may be, we will stay committed and faithful. And the greatest gifts of faith are not those that come to us personally but are the ones that impact our communities and families because we and others choose the life-giving way of Jesus.

Nevertheless, as we follow God's instruction, there are some benefits for us - almost as a by-product of becoming Christ-like. Unlike the "wicked" (as the Psalm calls them) we are assured of life beyond the grave. When our hearts are captured by the values and purpose of God's Reign, our heart's desires are satisfied, and we are able to navigate life's challenges more effectively. And even though others may not admit it, they will see God's goodness and grace radiating from us. This is why the Psalm instructs us not to worry about "the wicked", or what is going on in their lives, but rather to entrust our lives to God. This small act of commitment and faithfulness can have an amazingly far-reaching influence.

How can you trust in God and commit your way to God a little more today?

Do: Our acts of dedication have the greatest impact - on our ability to stay faithful to Jesus, and on those around us - when they are done in the midst of the greatest struggle, suffering or conflict. But, even when things are going well, it is a healthy practice to regularly reaffirm our commitment to the ways of Jesus. Why not go through today constantly reminding yourself of your dedication to God's Reign?

Pray: No matter what may be happening in the world, or in the lives of others, I commit my way to you, O God.

SATURDAY 01 OCTOBER 2022

Read: Matthew 20:29-34

Reflect: Blindness is used in all of the Gospels to reflect our ability to see, not just with our eyes, but with our hearts. Often when the Gospel writers tell stories of Jesus healing blind people, they either accompany their narrative with teaching about true seeing or they place the story in the midst of other stories that show what it means to really see Jesus and believe in him. This is the case with Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men.

Just before this story, Matthew places the account of the mother of James and John asking Jesus to put her sons on either side of his throne in his kingdom, which led into Jesus' teaching about suffering and servanthood. In this context, the simple, honest request of the two blind men is refreshing. They do not ask for anything more than the ability to see. But what they received was not just sight, but also faith - once they were healed, they followed Jesus without question. Even though others had told these men to be quiet and not bother Jesus with their cry, they saw Jesus' compassion and grace in a way that others didn't. Somehow, they knew that God's Reign was not for those who sought power or status, but for outcasts like them who simply wanted to see - both with their eyes and with their hearts. Their simply cry of faith opened them up to Jesus' healing.

What is the simplest, most honest cry of your heart today? How can you offer that to Jesus in faith and hope?

Do: The cry of the blind men was not just a call of need or even of faith. It was also a cry of praise - they recognised Jesus as the "Son of David", the Messiah, and acknowledged this publicly and vocally. Today, as you seek to open your life to Jesus in deeper ways, allow your praise to help you to see Jesus more clearly.

Pray: I praise you, Jesus, for in you I see and encounter God and I discover true faith.