

Sunday March 3rd Stewardship Week 3

Readings from Deuteronomy 15 and 16
1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19
Luke 21:1-4

Give liberally and ungrudgingly and the Lord will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

They have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty

Our opening text has Moses addressing the people immediately upon entering the Promised Land. This is a both a personal and communal call to **actively remember** what has happened to them *as the people of God*:

- their **liberation** from the desert after 40 years of wandering *due to their sinfulness*
- their **liberation** from Egyptian slavery

They are now called to remember their gracious and faithful God. How?

Active remembering? Moses explains how they are to live and how they were to worship ~ the key in this text being the **year of release** (Jubilee) every **7th** year. How would this work?

- Creditors would liberate those in debt – even if it were the year before Jubilee.
- The liberation of those in need through charitable giving ~ God blessing the rich and comfortable who cared for the poor *without being coerced*.
- Hebrews would liberate their Hebrew slaves/servants on the 7th year ~ and, not only that, but furnished them with food, wine and animals for their new life.
- In that 7th year, the rich and resourced were to actively remember the weak, symbolised in the enslavement of Israel in Egypt, remembering how all Israel gained its freedom.

Not only that, the people were to actively remember the gracious gifts of God in their feasts, in their worship, e.g., at Passover or on the festivals associated with the grain harvests. These were acts of *communal*

remembering of how God saved Israel and in return the people are to offer sacrifices and free will offerings, "*rejoicing before the Lord.*"

What are our true riches?

Timothy appears to challenge *our* entire cultural and economic system, our worldly orientation:

"...for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it".

Timothy criticises "***the love of money***" and "***the eagerness to be rich***" rather than material wealth as such which can, after all, be positive, creating employment or household security. No! It is the ***love of*** money which provides temporary satisfaction. It is the love of God which lasts forever.

Early Christians opposed the Roman wealth/status system and envisioned a more egalitarian distribution of material resources (Acts 4). Indeed, wealthy people were much appreciated "benefactors" of the early Church ~ Paul, for example, drew on the financial support of benefactors during his missionary tours.

The issue therefore is our ***attitudes and values***: the controlling of material wealth controls us ~ conflicting our trust in God and our discipleship of Jesus. Jesus was clear: those who have riches "***are to do good, be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing 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***"

The "***good fight of faith***" is therefore founded upon an ethos of Godliness and Contentment "***righteousness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness***" that will lead to eternal life.

Luke's Jesus challenges our sense of giving.

Jesus is shocked by what He witnessed in the Temple: people not worshipping God; men profiteering in the Temple. No wonder Jesus overturned the tables.

What motivated the widow?

There was a wooden box in the Temple complex for everybody to give for the poor and needy.

The rich came making a loud spectacle of themselves in their giving. Jesus notices a poor widow ~ who only owns two pennies and she puts both coins quietly into the box.

Spectacle and sacrifice.

How do these texts challenge us?

Jesus taught "***You can love God or you can love money but you cannot love both at the same time.***"

Giving is an act of love

What we **love** most gets most of our resources.

In giving all that she had, the widow demonstrated a massive act of love.

Giving is an act of obedience

Giving as a commandment: in the Old Testament we see **tithing** 10%: Jubilee or the land left free around a field at harvest for local poor to glean the unharvested crops. In the New Testament members of the church sold their possessions bringing not 10% or 50% but 100% of the profits to the offering plate.

The widow gives all she has as an act of obedience to the One True God.

Giving is an act of faith

Giving changes our focus: from ourselves, our stuff, to focus on God. The widow, giving all she had was a potential death sentence ~ how would she eat? God's kingdom is worth it ~ she is a woman of great faith.

Giving is an act of worship, an act of active remembering.

God commands us to remember, to let go – Jubilee; to remember all the God has done for us: our moments of liberation, keeping a memorial,

(the basis of the Lord's Supper, *thanksgiving*). The Bible is clear that when people forget memorials, they forget the lessons of the past.

Jesus is derogatory about "**earthly goods**", they are "**false gods**" that get in the way of true worship of the real God.

God is the ultimate giver, the Creator. God gave all that he had when He gave his only Son as a payment for our sin. Jesus promises that our sins will be forgiven ~ the promise that we can have abundant life here and now and eternal life in Heaven.

So, it's really not a big deal to give 100% of your money to God when He already holds our life, and our future, in His hands.

The challenge therefore, is to act like Jesus and the widow ~ to give **sacrificially**.

The word 'sacrifice' means to give until it hurts *just a little bit*, to offer from what God has graciously given us as an act of love, obedience, faith, worship. Giving as an intentional act of remembering, as an intentional sacrifice to the purpose of God, in our joint enterprise of building the Kingdom.

Give liberally and ungrudgingly and the Lord will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

Amen