

**A Word in Season -  
"Money"  
Matthews 6:19 - 21; 24**

So this morning, cast your mind back a few weeks when I began a series called "A Word in Season".

The first word was... doubt.



And I said that for many people, at the root of the doubt is a deep disappointment. Life and faith didn't go as they expected and to deal with doubt they needed to deal to the disappointments.



Then we talked about the uncontroversial subject of free speech and how wherever we fall on the issue of free speech, the gospel is non-negotiable. And I talked have that inner conviction, in the power of the Holy Spirit, that if we are ever compelled to be silent about Jesus we will obey rather than human beings.



We talked about how you and me are all works in progress; God's work in progress. We have an ultimate end which is amazing and even in the now you can be *different*, you be *changed* - you can make progress because God the Holy Spirit is at work in you.

So this is this morning's picture:



So of course we must be talking about... money.



Everyone take a sharp intake of breath☺.

I don't think it's too much of an exaggeration to say that when pastors and leaders talk about money, people squirm, they move to the edge of their seats.

So I went back and looked at the times I've spoken about money. In the 7 ½ years I've been here, I've addressed the topic 7 times specifically. (Two of those was as it came up in book of the Bible, four was part of a series and one was about greed).

I say this because if you are a guest here, a visitor (or even listening online) I don't want you to think, "Well, there you go! All the church talks about is money."

The literature says that a pastor or minister in a church should speak specifically on money once a year.

In all honesty, we actually only do this once a year, if that.

So to put you further at ease, here are a couple of readings.

Matthew chapter 6:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"No one can be a loyal servant to two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot faithfully serve both God and Money."

So to kick things off this morning, my first question:

***"Why do we talk about money?  
Should we talk about money?"***

If you feel like it, tell the person next to you.

If we're honest, Kiwi's and Kiwi churches, don't like to talk about money.

And I know the horror stories out there.

Some years ago I went to a conference in one of our larger cities and at one point one of the speakers yell, "If you don't give, you're a bludger, a freeloader and the Kingdom of God doesn't need you!"

And I could feel people around me become riled up.

With stories like this, I do come this morning with some hesitancy.

But we have to talk about money because the world talks about money.

In New Zealand we have an incredible amount of data and statistics around money.

- Among 2000 Kiwis surveyed, over 60 percent worry about money on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.  
46 percent said finances had adversely affected their mental health, 45.8 percent said they affected relationships and 35.8 percent said they affected their physical health.

- One in five people had relationship problems with partners, family or close friends due to financial concerns.

The 18-34 age group reported the highest degree of relationship strain due to money at 24 per cent according to the Commission for Financial Capability study.

The issue decreased with age with 21 per cent of those aged 35-54 experiencing problems, 14 per cent of those aged 55-65, and only 7 per cent of 65 and older saying they still had arguments over finances.

- In September last year New Zealanders collectively owed \$7.34b in credit card debt.

- Last Christmas Eve - Christmas 2020 - New Zealand shoppers set a new record for Eftpos transactions, reaching a peak of 204 transactions per second.

### ***“So do any of these surprise or stand out to you?”***

And for us here, we talk and we should talk about money because the Bible and the New Testament talks about money a lot.

Jesus himself talks *a lot* about money (and some would argue he does more frequently than any other subject apart from the kingdom of God).

In fact we must talk about money as a church and when we talk about money in the church, we have to talk about *giving*.

So my next question:

### ***“Why do we give? And why do we give to the church?”***

I’ve got three (there are more).

#### **❖ *To confront our feelings around money***

Our biggest problem with money often is *not* that we don’t understand what Jesus’ teaches about money and giving but that we haven’t come to terms with our feelings about it.

It's no wonder that Jesus speaks to the heart, the seat of affections:

"Where your treasure is your heart will be also."

Our affections have the ability to tame, mute and even nullify the Bible's teaching around money.

Often we are threatened by the talk about money and having to give.

We worry we will have too little; and every now and then we worry that we have too much.

For some of us there may be deep-rooted fears when it comes to money.

I think that sometimes we carry within us an 'inner voice' from childhood when our first impressions about money were formed.

Maybe some of us grew up in an environment where we were deprived.

Or maybe a parent's anxieties about not having enough have become our own.

Perhaps we were made fun of for being 'poor'. In any case the idea of being generous, of giving too much, is frightening.

We carry those over into today.

To be blunt, we struggle to trust God with our money.

We struggle to trust God to provide for His Church.

We don't think the Church should be asked to give and sometimes give more.

The greatest blockages to giving have little to do with the Bible's teaching but more about our struggles to have faith in our hearts.

Two:

❖ ***To break the grip of money***

The Bible does warn us about the dark side of money:

Money as a rival to God; an idol - Matthew 6:24

Money has the ability to stifle faith - Mark 4:18 - 19

It can destroy faith - 1 Timothy 6:9 - 10

It can be a gateway to other sins - 1 Timothy 6:10

Jesus is explicit; he warns us that money is not neutral.

When Jesus uses the word “Mammon” to talk about money and wealth, he speaking of in terms of being a ‘god’; he is giving it a personality and personal character.

And as a god Jesus speaks of it as being a master  
Whereas Jesus gives us freedom in our service, Mammon enslaves.  
Mammon is a power that seeks to dominate us.

Money wins the hearts of people;  
it seeks their devotion and following;  
it gives us apparent security and freedom;  
it can induce guilt;  
people have and will kill for it;  
it is a law unto itself.

It’s no wonder that churches have conflicts over money.

It gets people in its grip.

Jesus exposes its power and says the only way to break its grip is in giving.

It’s the giving and sharing of resources that breaks the grip, addiction to, power and seduction of money.  
And disciples know this.

Now at this point, the question is what?  
How... much?

And answer is often... a “tithe”, which by the way simply means “a tenth”.  
So we’re talking about giving 10 percent of our income to the church.

Tithing featured heavily in my early days as a follower of Jesus. I had no problem with giving. It was the right thing to do support the local church which was an immense encouragement to me.  
It was good to support its mission and ministry.  
It was a wonderful spiritual discipline.

Yet the question has to be this:

***“Is tithing, giving a tenth, mandatory for followers of Jesus today?”***

Where I'm up to is this: I'm of the settled conviction that tithing - giving tenth of your income - is not explicitly for Christians today.  
It is tied into the temple and priestly system that has passed away.

It can be a great starting point.

Tithing makes an excellent floor but a terrible ceiling.  
A strict tithe can actually be stifling.  
People will also say, "If you don't emphasise tithing, then people won't give!"  
If that's the case, there are heart issues that need to be addressed.

Not only that but tithing lacks something that Jesus is desperately concerned about: the state of our hearts because tithing doesn't dethrone money.  
We see this in the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were meticulous tithers, even giving a tenth of their garden herbs<sup>1</sup>  
(how that's measured I don't know).  
Yet these same Pharisees loved money; they were captivated by it.<sup>2</sup>

The tithe has may be a place for many of us to begin, a way to acknowledge God as the owner of all things, but it is only a beginning and not an ending.

The New Testament doesn't emphasise tithing - it emphasises something more challenging - disciples give out of *big-hearted, deep-pocketed, open-handed generosity*.

This generosity is not to so much impoverish to ourselves but enrich others – those in need, the church's mission and ministry and the wider world.

People will also say:

***"Why give to a local church when there are so many other excellent causes?"***

What would you say to that?

If you have been encouraged, if you've been comforted, if you've be supported and helped through a crisis, if you've grown in your faith through the ministries if this church, then that is great!

But for these to occur this local church needs financial support.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:42

<sup>2</sup> Luke 16:14

Someone had to the foresight to purchase this land many years ago.  
The buildings that we enjoy – and people in the community enjoy – need to be maintained.  
I mean I have friends from other churches who come here and comment of the fantastic facilities we have.

People from the wider community comment on how good they are.  
So we don't idolise our buildings; we do want to steward them well.

And as I've said before, we're not extravagant or excessive in our spending.

And by and large people who work for World Vision and Tear Fund and the like, belong to local churches, where they are built up and encouraged in their faith and work.

Which leads us to the third reason:

❖ ***The Church is central to God's purposes in the world.***

The church global and local made up of those gathered in Jesus name.

Not government or political parties, which seems increasingly clear.  
Not education although education broadens and creates opportunities.

Not business, although it can contribute to peoples wellbeing and future prospects.

Not individuals, although God bestows individuals with dignity.

NGO's aren't, even though they do good work.

Think of how highly Scripture speaks of the church, the gathered people of God.  
1 Peter 2 verses 9 and 10:

*"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

Peter was writing to a local church that may have been no larger than ours.

Paul called the church is a Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.



The Church globally, made up of all true believers, and its local expressions are central to what God wants to do on this planet.

For us, we are a growing church.

We are a church that God has blessed with children and young people and those further on in years and those in between.

As I said, the Church and churches are central to God's purposes in the world, and we're included in that.

When Jesus says, "Store up for yourself treasure in heaven" he is saying invest your money in what God values and prioritises *in the now*.

One of those is the Church/church.

That is why giving features in our worship services.

Not just as a way of raising funds but a tangible way to say we are investing in what God is doing through His church in the world.

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So what is it the Spirit speaking to you about this morning?

What is the Spirit saying to us as St Paul's?

Has God been speaking you about your affections?

If you're honest, when it comes to money, whether the church's or your own, you're anxious.

And for you this morning you need help to help to have renewed faith in God's ability to provide.

Maybe there are some of here and in your giving and for the season you're in it might be 5%.

For others the season you're in it's 15% or 20 or 35%.

It may be more.

That *big-hearted, deep-pocketed, open-handed generosity*.

For others it's a recognition that the Church is central to God's purposes on this planet and money needs to flow in that direction.