

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"True Discipleship" (part 6)

YOUR FINANCIAL SECURITY

We've been looking at one of the crucial challenges in life: how to handle money in a way that glorifies God. If we are going to talk about true discipleship, we must address the issue of wealth. The Bible is clear: everyone will be held accountable for how they use the wealth God gives them in this life.

Last week, we heard Jesus' profound words that get to the heart of the matter, taken from **Mt. 6:19-34**: Jesus said, *"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 neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...." "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."*

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

So there you have it in a nutshell. The key to true security in life, financial or otherwise, is seeking first the God's Kingdom and His righteousness, not only will we be in God's will and plan for our lives but we will be blessed with all that we need. And to have the blessing of God is to have His supernatural power working on your behalf. And isn't that what we all want? The world is under a curse. God wants us to redeem us from the curse and bless us.

Now, last week I said there are five biblical principles when it comes to money and seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness. We looked at the first three which included:

1) work hard and honestly. The Bible on many occasions affirms hard and honest work as the standard for a follower of the Lord.

2) plan carefully (ie. make a budget) - Jesus told us to count the cost of discipleship and likened it to a man building a tower. Before building he must make preparations and plans. We must do the same with our own finances.

3) save faithfully - God's Word teaches us the importance of saving so we are prepared for future crises and needs.

Today I want us to look at the final two principles.

SPEND WISELY

We are not only to work hard, make a budget, and save faithfully, but we are also to *spend wisely*.

1 Tim. 6:17-19: *“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”*

Isn't that a great passage? Note how it parallels Jesus' words we heard earlier from Matthew 6.

We are not to fix our hope on the uncertainty of riches. I think anyone who has ever invested in the Stock Market can appreciate those words. We can't put our hope and trust in riches. Why? Not only are they uncertain, but it is God who ultimately is in control of everything. But notice something else. He richly supplies us *all things* to enjoy.

Again, God wants to bless us and enjoy His creation and all that is in it. And so as He blesses us we are to bless others. How? Paul tells us: We are to do good, be rich in good works, be generous and share with others. In other words we are to spend wisely. We are to use our money for the common good and the purposes of God. And that means that we are to exercise discipline and prioritize our spending.

Now if you are like me, you look at taking care of the basic needs first - food, housing, clothing, family needs, transportation, and then the extras, which hopefully, includes the work of the Church. But should the Lord's be the last thing we look at? Actually, we are going to see it should be the first thing we do when it comes to our giving.

And this leads us to the fifth and final biblical principle: We are to *give generously*. St. Paul already alluded to it in the above passage from **1 Timothy**.

GIVE GENEROUSLY

Proverbs 11:25-26: *The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.*

In other words, one man gives freely another withholds. There is a choice everyone has. Will you be a generous giver or won't you? Jesus told us that we can't serve two masters; either Jesus is Lord of my life and therefore Lord of my money or else materialism and all that it represents will be Lord of my life.

God's answer to greed is to be generous. The only way it won't stick to you is if you give it away. Do you know the word, "give" is found 13,501 times in the Bible!?!

Now there is a foundational principle to the principal of generous giving and that is what the Bible calls the tithe. What is the tithe? It is the principle that the first ten percent of everything we receive goes directly back to the Lord and His work. Now all 100 percent is the Lord's, but God calls us to set aside 10 percent as holy unto Him and to sanctify or protect the other 90%. In other words, the first 10 percent redeems the rest. God says that if you follow this principle you will experience His blessing abundantly. And again, this means you will have supernatural power working on your behalf.

Recall Jesus said to seek FIRST God's Kingdom and Righteousness. One of the tangible ways we do this is by giving back to God the first fruits of our labor. Let's now go back to the beginning pages of the Bible, to Genesis.

THE FIRSTFRUITS AND THE TITHE

Genesis 4:2-5: *Again, Eve gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings (firstborn) of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7"If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."*

Abel brought the first born of his flock. But Cain literally took his time. Note the words, "in the course of time." Cain did not bring the first of his harvest but the last. He gave God the scraps, Abel brought God the best. We are told in **Hebrews 11:4** that for this very reason, Abel's was the *better* sacrifice.

Genesis 12:1-3: *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives. And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

Why did God bless Abraham? To be a blessing to others. God blesses us to bless others. That is a spiritual truth.

Genesis 14:18-20: *18And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all."*

Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High. Abram gave him a tenth. We know from several passages in **Hebrews** that Melchizedek foreshadowed the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 7:1-4 affirms that *"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils."*

Ex. 13:1-2: *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2"Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me."*

Ex. 23:19: *"You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God."*

Proverbs 3:9-10: *"Honor the LORD from your wealth. And from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty. And your vats will overflow with new wine."*

Romans 11:16: *If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.*

Leviticus 27:30: *"Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD."*

WHY THE TITHE?

Jesus said, *Where your treasure is there will your heart be, also.* He didn't say where your heart is, there will be your treasure. Why? Your heart follows the treasure. Again there is a choice. And *tithing* represents a test, a test of the heart. Remember *tithe* means "tenth."

And what is fascinating is that whenever the number ten is used in the Word, it usually is in reference to a divine test. How many plagues were there in Egypt? Ten How many times did God test Pharaoh's heart? Ten How many commandments to test our obedience? Ten How many days was Daniel and his companions tested to only eat vegetables in **Daniel chapter 1**? Ten How many virgins had their preparedness tested in Jesus' parable on being ready for His return that we heard in today's gospel reading from **Matthew 25**? Ten How many days of testing are appointed for the Church in Smyrna in **Revelation 2:10**? Ten

The tithe is a "heart test" for those who wish to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And even more amazing is that God Himself, tells us to test Him with His own principle. In fact, in Malachi we find the only place in Scripture where God says that we can test Him in this. Please turn with me now to

Malachi 3:6-15: "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

7"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?' You Have Robbed God

8"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! 10"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. 11"Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts. 12"All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

13"Your words have been arrogant against Me," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' 14"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts? 15"So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape."

God does not change neither do His expectations. For those who think tithing is no longer valid we need to look at an example from Jesus' ministry. **Mt. 23:23 (also found in Lk. 11:42): "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."**

When people say we are no longer under the principle of the tithe, I say on what basis? Jesus never did away with the tithe. Are you telling me that we are to give less under grace than under the law? If anything we are to give more.

Now remember we have been talking about walking in the blessing of God. It is why **Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."** Giving is God's divine vehicle to protect our hearts and the means to crush the greed and thorns that can choke our spiritual life. It is also the means for every believer to support His Church to accomplish His mission.

The truth is a tither understands three things when it comes to the why? They understand the principle, they understand the blessing, and they understand the need. And so what does it mean to be a faithful disciple when it comes to money and wealth? It means earning honestly, planning carefully, saving faithfully, spending wisely and giving generously. There is no other way. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!